

DRAMA AND SOCIETY  
IN  
CONTEMPORARY EGYPT

A Thesis Presented For The Degree Of Ph.D.

by

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## ABSTRACT :

The present work does not follow the traditional way which favours a historical approach to the subject. Its main aim is to shed just sufficient light on Egyptian drama to show the correlation and interaction between Egyptian drama and society. Historical plays, which may possess, as a phenomenon, a general social significance, have been excluded because they do not conform to this criterion. Neither do the purely "intellectual" plays as a group come within the scope of the work, though individual examples, if socially significant, have been dealt with in some detail.

The criterion according to which plays have been selected and included is their individual significance which is always difficult to assess independently from other plays of the same author. It is with regard to this fact as well as to insuperable chronological difficulties, which often make it impossible to trace the originator of a trend, that the material was arranged not according to trends, but to individual playwrights. The same consideration justifies the prominent position accorded to Tawfiq al Hakin, who has made so many revolutionary experiments in the field of drama. Moreover, an arrangement according to trends would have resulted in the omission of many significant plays which for one reason or another, do not form part of a specific trend.



In dealing with the individual play, the contents have always been given, either in form of a short synopsis, or of a longer summary interwoven with snatches of dialogue and preceded or followed by an analysis of the types and characters and an evaluation of the merits of the play in question whenever it was deemed necessary. Should the manner in which the thread of the action is occasionally followed seem, at times, too meticulous, it may be justified by the endeavour to convey the atmosphere.

A thorough treatment of the problem of originality and outside influence, which seemed very tempting, would have required too much space and has been strictly limited, as it represents the task of another thesis.

The introduction to the thesis deals with the choice of an appropriate title and gives the general outline of the work.

Chapter One describes the social, economic and political background of modern Egyptian literature.

The conditions of life which prompted and accompanied the emergence of drama in contemporary Egypt are fully described in Chapter Two, and followed by a brief survey of general trends in Egyptian drama in Chapter Three.

Chapter Four is entirely devoted to Tawfiq al Hakīm's conception of equilibrium, exemplified, in Chapter Five, by three typical instances.

Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. are a treatment of the change in social values, and the reconciliatory attitude towards social strife, as reflected in the drama of the same playwright.

Chapter Eight deals with the conservative approach as represented by Mahmūd Taymūr.

Chapter Nine contains the treatment of selected revolutionary plays by Nu'mān 'Ashūr.

Chapter Ten is a treatment of Fathi-Radwan's political and symbolic plays.

Chapter Eleven deals with two selected plays by Yūsuf es -Siba'i.

Chapter Twelve is a thorough treatment of drama and political unrest; it contains selected plays representing the call to "Look Back in Anger" , as reflected in post-revolutionary drama.

Chapter Thirteen and Fourteen show the reaction to the political drama in selected plays by Rashād Rushdī and 'Abdul Rahmān esh-Sharqawī.

The conclusions arrived at are summed up and briefly discussed in the final chapter.

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## INTRODUCTION :

The title " Drama and Society in Contemporary Egypt " is deliberately chosen to exclude misleading conceptions. Elusive titles such as " contemporary Egyptian drama " may suggest something which has never existed in reality. The isolated attempts of Ahmad Shawqi, at the turn of the nineteenth century, to call a kind of poetical drama into being were due less to the needs of his time than to his personal genius and ambitions, and were, therefore, not continued.

Drama as an original and creative movement is not observable in Egypt until the First World War. It emerged as a result and concomitant of the economic, social and cultural activities which shaped the life of contemporary Egypt. A full survey of social, economic and political conditions in modern Egypt provides a sound background of contemporary Egyptian literature in general, and is urgently needed to show correlations and interaction between the drama and the society in question. This, however, must not be hampered by any ideological conceptions on the Marxist pattern to the effect that it is "the methods of production in material life" that determine the character of its "social, political and spiritual process". Though it is undeniable that a people's culture takes its colour from the prevailing economic order, the influence of the economic factor, though powerful and ever-present, must not be overrated.



Before 1952, Tawfīq al Ḥakīm and Maḥmūd Taymūr were the only two playwrights of distinction in the field of social-purpose drama. The former who unceasingly brings promises to fulfilment, is seen working in this field virtually alone. His plays require a through study, as the continuity and consistency of Egyptian drama can most easily be traced in his works. The year 1952 - a major turning point in the history of modern Egypt - provides the strong impulse for veritable outburst of dramatic production. Mu'mān 'Ashūr deflects the traditional drama with some success in the direction of the popular theatre whose leader he consequently becomes. The preoccupation with the political aspect of the national life became so strong that it relegated most other considerations into the background: "Look back in anger" was a cry which found expression in a large number of political plays.

If viewed more closely, drama is found to play, in the nineteen fifties, a remarkable role in Egyptian national life. New playwrights prove bolder and more ambitious. Novelists such as Yūsuf es Siba'ī, Yūsuf Idrīs and 'Abdul Raḥmān esh Sharqawī joined the ranks of dramatists. The impact of Western drama, especially avant garde, on playwrights and audience begins now to be fully felt. Not only do names like Ibsen, Pirandello, Sartre and Ionesco assume a wide and almost compelling significance,



but many other prominent names in the Western and Eastern drama are heard of by many for the first time. Plays representing different trends and ideologies reach the general public not only through the necessarily limited possibilities of the stage, but also through the twin media of the radio and television, the radius of which is comparably wider. The immediate, pleasant reaction is easy to trace in many plays written, in the late nineteen fifties, by playwrights such as Tawfīq al Ḥakīm, Fathī Radwān, Rashād Rushdī and even in the work of other writers who are seen, until then, preoccupied with the political aspect of the national life. The significance of Rashād Rushdī lies in the fact that he has removed, as it were, the dust that was still rising from the political theatre, helping to pave the way for the symbolic drama which is based on a serious study of society. By 1960, the prevailing attention to political plays is no longer noticeable, and the political theatre is seen fading away.

#### Drama and Social Strife:

Social strife seems to be one of the main problems which concerned Egyptian playwrights from the very beginning. Parallel with the development of social consciousness and the spread of education, the conflict between the classes, which had been latent before, became acute in the late nineteen twenties. The Muslim Brotherhood -- formed in 1928 -- saw the solution of social problems in a Muslim society

whose government, conforming to Islamic principles, would bring about the solution of all evil in every field, social, moral or spiritual. Their preaching could only intensify social strife, as no positive solution was likely to be offered.

In their disappointment with Western democracy, which resulted in a general loss of faith in the ideals and principles it advocated, the Egyptian people, the middle class and workers in particular, began to view other ideologies with increasing sympathy. The nineteen thirties, the years of ideological confusion, saw the birth of many groups with extremist left tendencies, which attracted not only the working classes, but also, with growing speed, the intellectuals of every description. The foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood and Misr al Fatah coincided with the failure of the Wafd party which, initially a progressive party, had become subservient to feudalist circles and degenerated into a tool in the hands of profiteers. Surprisingly enough, the governments representing feudalism and capitalism made no attempt to check these tendencies by any real social reform, probably because they were too confident in their own power. The king who had the opportunity to wield absolute power and was able to dismiss and appoint any government and dissolve any parliament at will, made no move to interfere either. Gradually the conflict between the middle and upper classes increased, but had not



yet reached its climax. The political agitations in the thirties and forties give proofs that it was too late to stop the avalanche. Although study of dramatic literature in this period is needed to show the playwright's reaction to the main events and ideologies of the time.

By the end of the second World War social strife reached its utmost intense point. The workers employed by the British forces in Military bases on auxiliary services were comparatively well paid and were in possession of considerable sums of money while the war lasted. However, when the war was over , the country had no employment to offer them thus laying them open to the influence of left extremists. The wish to overthrow the existing social and political system became both more powerful and more general. This is obvious in many novels written at the time. One of the characters of Nagib Nahfūz's Zuqāq ul Midaq ( 1947), the scene of which is a working class area, speaks openly about the desirability of revolution. But this is by no means the only manifestation of the new spirit in literature. When ex-king Farouk returned to Cairo from a pleasure trip to the island of Capri, the left wing Misr al Fatah showed a huge photograph of a starving totally emaciated group of people with the caption : This is your people, Sire. Revolutionary ideas were voiced more and more frequently from the press. The two prominent figures working

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in the field, at the time, Tawfiq al Hakim and Mahmud Taymur, are known for their sound understanding of the requirements of dramatic art ; they never used direct expression. One expects, therefore , to find their reaction to this life on different levels, either in figurative expression or symbolism.

It is an indisputable fact that the class conflict was intensified mostly by natural ambition of the middle class for a share in the power and wealth. There is, however, the misleading idea that the economically dominant class exercises a great influence on drama in particular, a form of censorship which may shift the emphasis from defects characteristic of this class. That the Egyptian upper class had very limited influence on non-economic activities is undeniable, but <sup>in</sup> the case of the drama things can be slightly different.

It should be borne in mind that the middle class has always been able to direct or rather influence the mass media. Although on occasions factions arose with different views on aims and methods, the class as a whole recognised a need for the evolution of one class ideology. If one considers the writings on different levels at this period, one finds two attitudes prominent : Attacking the economic and political conditions which produced the people's three enemies - poverty, ignorance, and disease - on the one hand,



and criticising social and psychological defects which affected the Egyptian character and prevented the people from achieving a real progressive development on the other.

However, one is not inclined to accept the idea that Egyptian drama was written by bourgeois writers for the bourgeoisie, not only because the term "bourgeoisie" cannot accurately be applied to a group in Egyptian society which does not conform to the pattern of the Western European class system, but because the real class division was almost between aliens and Egyptians. Even those who had managed to penetrate the aristocracy did not join in its total separation from the majority of the Egyptian people.

#### Social Theory.

Assuming that the 1919 revolution represents the starting-point of contemporary Egyptian literature, the social theories to be considered must fall within the period between 1919 and the present day. One must bear in mind that after the 1919 Revolution and the declaration of independence in 1922, Egypt had a constitutional government, but not full sovereignty, and this was what the people of the country set out to achieve. But in their social theories, economists and sociologists on the country failed to produce a general formula. The ruling system was, until 1952, a combination of monarchy, feudalism and capitalism, but basic changes of that system were not even envisaged before the appearance on political scene, of the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter

thought that the social problems could be solved by idealistic philanthropic means, i.e. by individual generosity; they wanted to carry out reforms within the framework of Islamic law which presupposes a high level of morality and leaves most decisions to individual conscience. They did not propose a practical solution to the problems of social injustice. That is why they were considered a religious society, in the conventional meaning of the word, rather than a political party. In the early nineteen forties, the majority of the intelligentsia believed that the Brotherhood had contributed no more than emotional slogans.

During and after the Second World War, the feeling of unrest intensified, but not even the leaders of <sup>the</sup> 1952 Revolution thought in social terms. The six principles declared, in 1952, "were not a complete theory", and the new social formula did not emerge until 1960.

However, a change and a considerable ~~phenomenon~~<sup>no</sup> occurred in Egypt at the time. In the normal order of things, social changes take place and are then mirrored in literature. What happened here was the reverse. The literary treatment of socialist reform preceded its realization in actual life. Literature abandoned difficult psychological problems in favour of straightforward social themes. The exponents of this tendency, in the novel, are Nagīb Mahfūz and 'Abdul Rahmān esh Sharqāwī whose social, nature works appeared in



the 1940's and the early 1950's respectively.

Nagīb Mahfūz who, in the 1930's, showed interest in historical novels with an indirect reference to contemporary political problems,<sup>(1)</sup> abandoned politics in favour of social problems. But the stress was even here on the psychological aspect of the individual.<sup>(2)</sup> As to 'Abdul Rahman esh Sharqawī, he gives preference to collective problems, e.g. the struggle of a whole village against feudalism in "Al Ard" (The Land). The plays written before, during and after the Second World War, evinced an approach which can be described as a Socialist one. A thorough study of these plays will, therefore, be very necessary. After 1956, when there was a social theory in existence, the playwright's approach to the problems of class conflict, a basic and recurrent theme of Egyptian literature, is to be considered together with its social and ideological significances. There is, for instance, the reconciliatory attitude of Tawfiq al Ḥakīm, which advocates the possibility of a settlement through understanding, love and forgiveness. Opposed to this is the attitude of Nu'mān 'Ashūr, who rejects the idea of reconciliation, and insists

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- (1) It is believed that "Radūbīs" which describes the ancient Egyptian struggle against the foreign occupation of the Hyksos, establishing a parallel with Egypt's political struggle against the occupying power in the 20th century.
- (2) This is obvious in the characters of Zuqāq ul Midaq, Bidāya wa Nihāya, even in his masterpiece "Al Thulatiyya".

on absolute isolation of the upper class. Each of these attitude has its social and ideological significances and indicates the change in the social theory which has taken place.

#### Drama and Self-criticism.

Self-criticism became a remarkable trend in Egyptian literature immediately after the breakdown of the constitutional system in 1924. Lutfi es Sayyid was the first to throw light upon the maladies of Egyptian society at the time. In some of his essays, he demonstrated the necessity of self-criticism by exposing social defects and forces of decay working in the society. This trend is also reflected in the writing of other reformers, which led, later, to what may be regarded as a development towards critical realism.

To mention but one, passivity has been one of the major social defects which have influenced the modern Egyptian personality and is still controlling the attitude and behaviour of individuals of a certain kind. This passivity has been inherited from circumstances in absolute Monarchies, and it had been hoped that the constitutional system resulting from the National Revolution (1919) would free the Egyptian community from its passivity towards all deeds initiated by the Government. But the quick collapse of that revolution had an adverse influence on



the generation which witnessed the failure of constitutional governments to identify themselves with the hopes of the Egyptian people for a better life, free from the chains of exploitation and underdevelopment. "The intellectual and political disarray acting and reacting on each other atomized society into a chaos of individuals, each living for himself". The character of Kamāl in Nagīb Mahfūz's *Bain al Qasrain*, *Qasr al Shawq* and *Al Sukkariyya*, who is said to be the portrait of the author himself, analyzes the impact of these events on the minds and hearts of the intelligentsia. Kamāl's passive attitude towards current events, and even towards his own problems, condemned him to a life of spiritual and intellectual loneliness, and immersion in abstract philosophy. The character of Quwayya in Farīd abū Ḥadīd's *Azhar al Shawk* penetrates the other side of life in feudal society where the people lose the desire to struggle and in consequence lose their sanity. The development of drama towards critical realism should be dealt with in some detail.

#### Dram and Politics :

There are special reasons why public attention was sharply focused on the fallen regime after the 1952

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(1) Gamāl Ahmed: *The Intellectual Origin of Egyptian Nationalism*,

(2) *DAR AL MA'ARIF*; CAIRO 1954

Revolution. The history of the pre-revolutionary era contains sufficient reasons for this and for the part played by political themes in the literary output of the nineteen fifties in general and in drama in particular. The failures of the past accentuated the wish to bring to light the "enemies of the people" who secured the lion's share of agricultural and industrial profits, and who were guilty of social injustice and political humiliation. This made the whole fallen regime the target of attacks.

The aspects and significance of the political play are to be discussed in some detail. There is, however, the question of tracing the motives which prompted the political trend immediately after the 1952 Revolution. The thought that it might all have been inspired from above will, unavoidably, occur first, for the efforts of the revolutionary order to create a uniform climate of opinion undeniably led to the attempt to control the mass media. Also the system of prizes for the most prominent publication, including drama, seems to support this assumption. However, plausible as this assumption appears, it simply does not hold in the case of the bulk of drama in question, for there is ample evidence to suggest that the prizes went to plays which were purely artistic. Also the theatres always give more attention

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(1) Wu'nan 'Ashūr's *The people at the Bottom* was the first to get the annual prize of the Ministry of National Guidance. ~~Wu'nan~~

to plays which have no direct political approach.

The second assumption is that it is<sup>a</sup> question of a phenomenon analogous to the French "Litterature Angagee". What speaks in favour of this is that Egyptian critics, among them Tahā Hussein, showed a greater interest in this attitude long before the revolution.

Whatever the case may be, the only definite connection with the revolution was that it created the conditions in which that political drama could develop freely. The large number of plays with apparent political tendency owes its existence to these conditions.

Another fact which deserves attention is that most playwrights have written plays with an either indirect or direct political message. As to playwrights who have never written any, such as Rashād Rūshdi, they belong to a group which entered the examatic field when the high tide of this political trend has already subsided. Moreover, the reaction against political orientation was so strong that almost all Egyptian playwrights turned, in the early nineteen sixties, to symbolism and social criticism. This phenomenon will be dealt with in detail.

The difficulty of pinpointing political play writers should be appreciated, because most of them had made a good contribution in the field of social-purpose drama. This will, inevitably, make an exact classification of playwrights



almost impossible.

However, it will be necessary to attempt to provide the answer for at least one important question: Can plays of primarily political content be included under the heading of social-purpose drama? It is a fact that a social-purpose play has as one of its aims to shake and help to destroy the foundation of a decadent order, values and ideologies, in order to replace them with new ones. These plays, exposing social relations under an opposite order, fulfil therefore this definition, or are at least on the border line of it. The subject matter of these plays in their essentials will be discussed from the view point with which this thesis is concerned.

#### The Strength of Reaction :

However, the conditions which prompted the political trend did not stop playwrights' repeated attempts to remove the theatre from the political arena. The success of Tawfiq al Hakim's *Al Sultān ul Hāir* encouraged other playwrights <sup>to make</sup> new experiments, and to find new means of expression. The audience appreciated so much the figurative approach of this play that it had obviously gone a long way, since the time when Tawfiq al Hakim considered it unfit to understand serious plays. The theatre had, undoubtedly, reached the point at which the ability of the audience to relish and responded to purely

symbolic plays had also become a fact. The increasing number of Western plays influenced both playwrights and playgoers. These plays, translated, provided with long introductions and published on a large scale, had so much effect that even before the Egyptians became familiar with Ionesco's theatre of the absurd, Al Hakīm's 'Ya Tāli' esh-Shagara had an immense success, obviously because it indicated a step in the right direction away from naturalism. By this masterpiece, the tendency towards symbolism and folklore themes became more visible.

The symbolic approach indicates, in fact, a sound understanding of the requirements of the present-day Egyptian theatre. Presumably, this new trend, with its obvious tendency to reconcile folklore and literature, may help to resolve the theatrical crisis which seemed to be inevitable at a time when the young generation of playwrights contented themselves with the social and political facts in pre-revolutionary society. It is a fact that folklore could supply rich theatrical subjects which lie on the boundary between the realistic and the non-realistic. Also symbolism, with its exaggeration of action, may " push the theatre beyond the intermediate zone which is neither theatre nor literature".

-1-

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(i) cf. Frederick Lunley: Trends in 20th Century Drama; 1961; p. 147.

However, Tawfiq al Hakim's reference to Beckett and Ionesco, among otherss, as representative of the non-  
 -1-  
 realistic trend in Western drama, may lead to mis-  
 interpretation. Beckett and Ionesco are known to some  
 critics as representatives of a developing school for  
 -2-  
 pessimism. Presumably the years of crisis, defeat and  
 the overthrow of established principles and conduct,  
 followed by the hollowness of the post-war years had  
 provoked pessimism as was reflected in the work of  
 certain European playwrights. This was the case with  
 -3-  
 Germany after the First World War. But nothing of the  
 kind had happened in Egypt. Everything was a confirmat-  
 ion of optimism, especially at the time when the non-  
 realistic approach had found its way into the Egyptian  
 theatre.

The question of Western influence is, however,  
 unavoidable in this particular case. In the early  
 nineteen twenties, when the non-realistic trend appeared  
 in a few plays by Alfred, Jean Cocteau and Marcel  
 Ashard, Tawfiq al Hakim was in France and, as he himself

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(1) cf. F. Lumely; Trends in 20th Century Drama;  
 v.pp.138; 151.

(2) Yā Tali' esh Shagara; p. 14

(3) F. Lumley; op. cit. p. 140

(4)



confesses, felt deeply affected by the new trend. However, "the kind of drama fashionable at the time was based entirely on reason"<sup>-1-</sup>. Thus he fell under the spell of "modernism" and wrote his first three intellectual plays. But when he went again to France (1959-1960), he found that the non-realistic trend has established itself", and that he was no longer able to resist the temptation. The Egyptian folklore which, he claims, knew non-realism centuries before, supplied him with the subject and the title of his non-realistic play, *Yā Tāli' esh Shagara*.<sup>-2-</sup>

It seems that what matters very much in this context is the form, not the content. Exaggeration is the essential characteristic of non-realism, or the so-called "Theatre of the Absurd"; Ionesco's first rejection of the established theatre at the time was motivated by the claim that its world was an exaggeration of reality, but when he saw his play "La Cantatrice Chauve" performed, he became convinced that, far from exaggerating too much, it did not exaggerate enough, and that it was essential to exaggerate still further to the natural limits of the theatre.<sup>-3-</sup> He also claimed

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(1) *Yā Tāli' esh Shagara*; introduction; pp. 10; 13.

(2) *ibid.* pp. 15; 19.

(3) F. Lumley; *Trends in 20th Century Drama*; pp. 146-147.

that he wanted to be "an objective witness of his own subjectivity, to portray the world as it appeared to him as sincerely as possible"<sup>-1-</sup>. this is also the characteristic of the Egyptian non-realistic drama, which "take refuge in illogical events and ways of expression to portray and reflect actual life"<sup>-2-</sup>. One is inclined to accept the Western influence as an undeniable fact in the case of the non-realistic trend, though it is also a fact that it was motivated and prompted by the strength of the reaction caused by the political play.

Finally, there will be the question of over enthusiastic critics who tend to bestow on everything that has been written after 1952 the term "literature of the revolution", perhaps assuming that, by so doing, they confer on it additional praise. Although one has to agree that the thoughts and ideas the plays express and the trend by which they are influenced are radical and revolutionary, and centre on demands for changes and reform, it would be erroneous to accept them all as an expression of post-revolutionary process and conditions of life. Tāhā Hussein<sup>-3-</sup> was the first to point to this error of generalization. It is undeniable that these plays appeal to a society

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- (1) v. F. Lumley; Trends in 20th Century Dram; p.147, and Eugene Ionesco Plays; p.vii; John Calder; London; 1960.  
(2) T. Al Hakim; Yā Tāli' esh Shagara; p.15  
(3) cf. T. Hussein; Alwan; Dar al 'Ilm; Beirut 1960; pp.148; 64



which has been formed by the processes of life under the monarchy, and whose conscience strongly rejects the corruption and social injustice resulting from the feudal order. They were written with an audience in mind whose thoughts and feelings had roots in the last three agitated decades of the monarchy, and must, therefore, be considered a part and extension of the literary output of the pre-revolutionary era.

Thus, it would be premature to expect from the drama of the nineteen fifties an accurate portrayal of the full impact of the events of the revolution. However, the experiences of the revolution were later to achieve literary fruition by providing new themes and situations, and more freedom in handling subjects which had been practically taboo before, though they had not been put to full, ~~the~~ literary use before 1960. By then, the social content was no longer limited by the means of expression or the receptivity of the audience.

In an attempt to explain the reasons behind the dearth of the literary production in the first three or four years after the 1952 Revolution, Tāhā Ḥussein recalls a similar phenomenon in the early Islamic period which followed on the "Islamic Revolution". He also recalls the decline of French literature in the decades following the French Revolution, and is inclined to

consider the scarcity and relatively low standard of literary production an unavoidable consequence of any social upheaval. 'The literature which emerges during the revolution' he argues, 'either obeys its original instance, so that it becomes a link with the older literature, or attempts to conform to (the principles of) the revolution; preaches and propagates it. In times of revolution, when some are full of aspiration and ambitions, and others are full of fears and caution, men of letters are hesitant. The people are preoccupied with what happens and what is expected to happen and what the happenings will lead to. Also literature, especially in modern times, derives its strength from unrestrained freedom, but freedom is temporarily limited by events surrounding the revolution whether people like it or not. Literature struggles for freedom before the revolution becomes a fact ... but during the revolution it cannot oppose it, ... since the revolution is its product and its fruit, and only delays freedom to release it later on. Thus, you can expect the the literature of the revolution from a later generation. What we have nowadays is revolutionary literature, not the literature of revolution, and there is a great difference between the two .

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(1) cf. Tāhā Hussein; *Khīṣam wa Naqd*; 2nd ed. 1960; Dar al 'Ilm; Beirut; pp. 158; 64



One must agree that the direct approach adopted by some playwrights, during the period in question, was by no means an advantage from the viewpoint of artistic merit. With a few exceptions, the plays closely associated with political corruption under the old régime were neither more nor less than a "look back in anger" to the days of the playwright's unhappy youth.

-2-

#### The Problem of Language:

The fact that the Arabs possess two languages of which one is the language of writing, and the other the language of conversation, has created a very difficult problem for both writers and critics. The first language has been known to all educated Arabs in their different countries in ancient and modern times, and the other, the spoken language, differs from one country to another, and from one time to another. Before the onset of the Arab Renaissance the written language was exclusively classical Arabic, even in the periods of literary decline, e.g. under the Ottoman Turks and the Mamelukes when both form and Content of literature was determined in the eyes of critics by its refined classical language. This had been acceptable when the bulk of Arabic literature consisted of essays and articles on the one hand, and poetry on the other. However, the new literary genres required a new technique

(2) The problem of "Form and Content" is dealt with more exclusively in another work by the author.

v. Trends Towards Realism in Contemporary Egyptian Novel.

and approach. The dialogue in a play or a novel is said to be badly expended if it is in classical Arabic, for the simple reason that this is not spoken in reality.

After the 1919 Revolution, two modes of approach developed : The new generation of writers i.e. Mahmūd Taymūr, Zaki Ṭulaimāt, Ibrāhīm al Maṣri, Ṭāhir Lāshīn and others held fast to Egyptian dialect, while tradition-bound writers insisted on the use of classical Arabic. The feelings and ideas resulting from the revolution advocated the use of Egyptian dialect in an attempt to achieve local nationalism and an independent personality. To quote Mahmūd Taymur : "This was to comply with the national aspirations of the time. In the opinion of the young generation, colloquial language was the main feature of personality, an aspect of nationalism and a proof of independence. Also we welcomed the idea of writing in Egyptian dialect to express our own circumstances, environment and social life. What supported our viewpoint was that the literary style of the classical Arabic of the time seemed to be overloaded with rhetoric, beautifying metaphors and similes, which led to lifeless and unactive styles.

The modern argument is that when a story is put on the stage where its characters can be heard talking it will help to create the right atmosphere and attain



the effect intended if the characters speak as they are accustomed to in their public and private life. The antithesis is that plays written in dialects or colloquial language can only be acceptable on the stage of the country they were written for, but not in other countries, and that regionalism in literature, even a regional theatre, may constitute a real danger for the future of a united Arab culture.

Language is no problem for historical and intellectual drama. In the field of the social-purpose play, many attempts have been made to find a solution to the problem of language, or rather to solve the supposed contradiction between classical style and realistic performance, and yet no final solution has been found. However, one must stress the fact that almost all Egyptian playwrights are aware of the intricacy of the problem. Mahmūd Taymūr used to write his plays, one version in classical Arabic and another version in colloquial and publish the two versions in one volume. He then turned once and for all to classical Arabic.

As for Tawfiq al Ḥakīm, it seems that he believes that the classical language is not adequate for modern social plays. In the introduction of one of his latest plays, *Ya Tāli' esh Shagara*, he maintains that "since the play is not a realistic one, there will be no need

for its language to be realistic, and it will be more suitable if its unreal events are expressed in an un-  
<sup>-1-</sup>realistic language, namely non-colloquial. However, all his plays, except Al Zammar, are in classical Arabic. The simplicity of his style is unique, as everybody can understand and relish it. Even his jokes are classical, but not uniform, Arabic; a device which seemed theoretically impossible. In an attempt to find an "adequate theatrical language", he wrote one of his social-purpose-plays, Al Şafqa ( The Deal ), in a language which can be read as both classical and colloquial Arabic. However, one is inclined to maintain that this attempt offered no proper solution of the problem.

The argument of another playwright, Fathī Radwān, reflects the confusion and misunderstanding in dealing with this problem. In the introduction of the play, Shaqqa lil-Īgār, he opposes the idea that the audience is not in a position to understand and relish plays unless they are written in colloquial, and stresses his opinion that readers and audiences always appreciated pure classical Arabic. "It is undoubted fact", he argues, "that all newspapers with a large circulation in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, even humorous papers, were written in classic Arabic. These news-papers



dealt with different subjects, criticising, satirising and portraying the foibles and defects of individuals and society, using classical Arabic of the best quality". "Both the serious drama", he continues, "and the comic opera flourished well into the nineteen ~~thirties~~, though they were in classical Arabic, and no critic, no patron or actor ever complained of that". He also considers the use of colloquial language a crisis, and ascribes it to the lack of seriousness in Egyptian society which resulted from the breakdown of the 1919 Revolution. Surprisingly enough, this defence of the classical language is contained in the introduction to one of his plays half of which is written in colloquial. His justification of this is that the colloquial language has a part to play in the development of the language and must fulfil it without being despised or overloaded: " A colloquial language has its own characteristics, and if any one wants to use it in a literary work there is no need to make a fuss about it ". He also tries to find a place for both classical and colloquial language by assigning to each its frontier. The comedy, which deals with everyday problems, he says, requires the use of colloquial, and it should <sup>-1-</sup> therefore, be used without further ado.

(1)Fathi Radwan; Shaqqa lil-Iḡār;Kutub lil-Gami;1959; pp.6;12

There is also the argument of the tradition-bound critics who insist on the literary quality of drama, as of any other work of literatures. One is inclined to maintain that both literary quality and dramatic quality have been given an established definition through the experiences of contemporary playwrights, and is bound to be acceptable to literary people. This thesis proposes, therefore, to attempt a study of drama judged as <sup>an</sup> art, bearing in mind that the use of dialects and colloquial language can hardly be considered something against the tradition of drama in modern times.



## The Background of Contemporary Egyptian Society

Drama is essentially the product of an environment. The difference between the various types of drama which make up a vital part of humanity's cultural heritage all stem from the difference between the environments which inspired them. The factors which shape the environment, and its resultant culture, are regional, religious and economic, and also connected with the environment's previous culture patterns and its development in relation to other surrounding environments.

The environment which has given birth to contemporary Egyptian drama is a society in which diverse and often conflicting influences and cultural patterns have come into contact. This has led to rapid changes in society, and the works of its drama have often been part of a process of social experimentation. Contemporary Egyptian drama is consequently both critical and forward-looking.

It is clear from these facts that any study of contemporary Egyptian drama would be sadly incomplete without a study of the environment which produced it. This work therefore opens with summary of the main social, economic and ideological forces which have made Egypt what it is today.

The economic order in monarchic Egypt:

It is necessary within the scope of this study to

describe some intrinsic aspects of the economic order which moulded the basic features of Egyptian society in monarchic Egypt. The economic order whose foundations were laid down by Muhamad 'Ali Pasha after he came to power in 1805, and which lasted throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, was a mixture of the economic pattern dominant in the Mamlūk and Turkish eras and the new pattern which resulted from the building up of Muhamad 'Ali's agricultural monopoly. This monopoly was broken by Said Pasha and the lands were redistributed later to members of military and other aristocratic strata who thus became the new feudal class in Egypt, although one must bear in mind that a large number of these aristocrats were not of Egyptian stock. The original plan of Said had been to distribute land to the peasants. These, however, were unable to safeguard their interest and soon fell into the power of the dominant class. The net result was the building up of large estates, often by means of confidence tricks. This was the turning point from the old order which prevailed in the middle ages to a feudalist order, out of which an embryonic capitalism grew later.

Trade and industrial life underwent a radical transformation in the period which is of the greatest interest in this context. The inherited economic order



under the Turks made of Egypt an exclusively agricultural country. The reasons for this state of things were manifold; all the able craftsmen of the country were conscripted and sent to Turkey proper to contribute to its modernisation. The Turkish regime encouraged agricultural activities to the detriment of any others, especially as the peasants were easy to exploit. In short, the Egyptian was regarded as simply a fellah.

However, under Muhamad 'Ali, the Egyptian economy took on a new stage. The aim he pursued was the building up of the military power of the country, and he subordinated everything else to this aim. That is why he fostered education and industry. Though the newly born industry collapsed after his defeat in 1840, the industrial spirit could no longer be suppressed. The period of British occupation proved unpropitious for the development of industry, for priority was given to a reform plan aiming to increase agricultural products mainly cotton, but the conditions prevailing during the First World War were a congenial home for a more developed industrial plan. The modern pattern of industry which now employs more than one and quarter million workers, emerged after the 1919 Revolution when the idea prevailed that political freedom is best based on economic independence.



With the emergence of Bank Misr , as well as the exigencies of two world wars, there was a steady acceleration in industrialising Egypt and a considerable urban proletariat was formed during and after the Second World War. But the major growth of the industry was not achieved until after the 1952 Revolution.

To all intents and purposes then Egypt had a predominantly peasant population exploited by a feudal system until shortly before the establishment of the Republic. The peculiar characteristic of Egypt throughout this period was its division into two radically opposed groups.

The first of these groups consisted of the autocracy, which can be considered virtually a foreign entity, being composed in the early stages of Turks or Turkicised Egyptians. Right up to the 1919 Revolution , the aristocracy was alien in its culture , outlook , and also its language ; so that even the racially-Egyptian elements in it spoke French - the language of the salons - and subscribed to The Khedive Ismail's theory that Egypt was an outpost of Europe. On the other side were ranged what might be termed the Ehyptian masses : the workers, peasants and middle class. The latter, comprising the merchants, civil servants, ulama and educated and professional people in general, identified themselves as Egyptians culturally, politically and linguistically.

At first fulfilling a mere passive role, they eventually became the backbone of the country, providing its cultural and ideological leadership, and influencing the classes above and below them. From these above facts, one can observe that the conflict was simultaneously one of class, cultural identity and , to a great extent, of national identity also.

On occasions when Egyptians climbed the social ladder, they generally preserved their identification with their people, rather than identifying themselves with the foreign aristocracy. As an example of this, Tawfīq al Hakīm, despite his aristocratic upbringing and Turkish mother , expressed the problems and needs of the Egyptian people to whom his father belonged. Another aristocrat whose sympathy has been with the common people is Mahmūd Taymūr.

These economic conditions unavoidably affected the cultural life of the community. The preponderance of agriculture in the economy, the feudalist exploitation, the class distinction that split the country in two, and the emergence of an urban working class are all described in many plays that are typical of contemporary Egyptian drama.

#### Historical Forces Behind Contemporary Egypt:

It is also necessary to outline the feature of contemporary Egyptian society with a view to revealing the conflicting forces within it , the reaction which these forces provoke, and the repeated attempts by the people to change the conditions of life around them.



The roots of the modern Egyptian people extend back into an ancient **civilization** which arose more than 4,000 years before the advent of Christianity. Thiler ancestors, the ancient Egyptians, succeeded in building a civilization with its own particular characteristics, and the Egyptian people wttill hold fast to some traditions and customs which can **easily** be traced back to their ancestors of Pharaonic times. The most important of these characteristics which the Egyptians still preserve ( from their ancestors ) is the "glorification of power", the characteristic which led the ancient Egyptians to **defy** the Pharaohs and prevented them from rebelling against absolute rule.

Likewise the modern Egyptian people preserve traditions and customs which can be traced back to Christian civilization which was predominant before Islam and survived beyond the Islamic conquest.

Religion, in all eras Pharaonic, Ptolemaic, Roman and christian, was a fundamental force which influenced the spiritual, economic and social process of life. It exerted a vital influence in all spheres of cultural activity, among them literature and art. The pyramida and temples in Egypt bear witness to the fact that the Egyptians are by nature a religious people. When they were converted to Christianity in Roman times, they sincerely tried in spite of all persecution to spread the principles of their new Faith. After her conversion to Islam, Egypt proved a pillar of Islamic **civiliaztion**. The religious tendencies of the

Egyptians were abused by native as well as Turkish despots to keep them in subjection : "Paradise belongs to the poor ", "One must obey authorities at any cost ", "Rebellion is worse than murder" were maxims which lent themselves admirably to their purpose. This is why Mohammad 'Abdul and other reformers attacked the weakening tendencies, and attempted to establish a sound understanding of the precepts of Islam. It is evident from the writings of Mohammad ' Abdul that misunderstanding of religion led to an paralysis of thought. Consequently a conflict arose within the ranks of religion and within the Sufi orders consisting of semi-educated and ignorant people, between enlightened Muslims and the bigots who clung to their misinterpretations and bogus traditions. If one examines current proverbs indicative of society's mentality, one observes that the passive side of Islam had nearly come to vanquish its more positive side, as an inevitable consequence of the form of social system that was imposed on Egypt over the centuries.

After the Islamic conquest, there was an increase in the immigration of Arab tribes into Egypt. These intermingled with the Egyptians, and brought to the Egyptian people not only the religion of Islam but also many Arab traditions and customs. Most of these immigrants were assimilated into the Egyptian population, while some continued to lead a bedouin way of life. With the passing of time, Egyptian society became Arab in religion, language and culture, and



the people's attachment to their Arabdom increased; so much that it can justifiably be said that this attachment to Arabism is one of the most decisive forces in moulding the trend of development in Egyptian society.

It is a familiar phenomenon in history that military invasion brings in its wake the influence of the conquering civilization. But the Egyptians managed, throughout the period of the Turkish occupation, to preserve their Arab identity, and Turkish influence remained confined to certain limited circles. One must bear in mind that Turkish civilization did not seek to destroy the roots of Arab civilization, of which it was an extension. The Turkish invasion did not affect the Arab identity of Egypt for a variety of additional reasons ; in particular since the Turks, who considered themselves a superior race, did not mix with the Egyptians except within the narrowest social limits. Likewise the spirit of snobbishness, and the political and the economic system which they impose on Egypt, enlarged the gap between Arab Egyptian society on one side and Turkish and Turkicised Egyptian on the other. Eventually, during the French invasion at the end of the 18th century, yet another conflicting element was introduced into Egyptian society, namely that of Western civilization.

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( 1 ) This is described clearly in Tawfiq al-Hakim's 'Awdat al Ruh, in his portrayal of the conflict between the Egyptian peasants and the bedouins, due to latter's superiority complex.

The Napoleonic invasion which lasted for only three years (1798 - 1801) marked the beginning of Western influence in Egypt. This was, however, limited to the aristocracy and the intellectual circles : the peasants and working classes were not affected by it at least until the First World War. They remained, in their life and outlook, isolated from the upper classes of the society, for the contact between classes was exclusively economic - the lower classes worked for the upper without the two sharing any other aspect of life in common. Thus the mode of life remained unchanged in many respects, especially that of the peasants and workers.

Under such conditions, the minority of educated people capable of positive action were in a state of confusion, and only set themselves the limited objective of removing foreign occupation without envisaging other wider social changes, as can be seen even from Mustafā Kāmil's Nationalism. ~~They were~~ They were not concerned with social injustice or any other field of reform.

Nevertheless, one must bear in mind the fact that nationalism in that period was basically the same as the nationalism of Europe during the middle and latter parts of the 19th century ; that is, it was ethnic in its inspiration. The growth of the ideology-state of which contemporary Egypt is an example, and to which Arab Nationalism is directed by its socialist content, is a phenomenon characteristic of the 20th century. Thus we could not have expected those pioneer



nationalists to advance a highly developed ideological nationalism, although some of the social injustices of their time clearly demanded a radical solution.

Social Conditions. :

During the latter half of the 19th Century tension developed between the two civilisations , the Arab-Islamic and the Western; the latter first represented by the French. But even a large number of educated people adopted a conflicting attitude towards the civilization of the West; there was one tendency which welcomed it and another which rejected it, looking for guidance to Islamic principles and tradition. There were partisans of tradition and partisans of Westernization in about even numbers among the well-educated Egyptians. This conflict extended, as it is expected, to culture and coloured the movement known as Harakat al Ba'th ( The renaissance ) which arose in the second half of the 19th century. It was expected that the pro-Western tendency would get the upper hand as it was new and more dynamic, and seemed the more attractive of the two, but the Arab-Islamic tendency maintained its strength until a sort of co-existence between the two cultures materialised.

As an indication of this, we must remember the methods used by social and political reformers to arouse the people of Egypt in particular, and the Islamic World in general, from their medieval mentality. These reformers like Jamāl ed Din el Afghānī, Muḥamad Abdul and Qāsim Anīn , based

their efforts on an appeal to the Islamic, not the Western, code of values. Thus when the latter wanted to free Egyptian women from the veil, he did not point to the more enviable position of their sisters in the Western countries, but pointed out that the enslavement of women was contrary to the precepts of Islam. This is obvious from his numerous quotations from the Qur'an and the Hadīth. Further proof that the Islamic trend had become stronger is the foundation, in the 1928's, of the Muslim Brotherhood, which disagreed with many social aspects of the West, while recognising the value of Western science and learning.

It is not premature to maintain that Egypt has evolved, after the 1952 Revolution, a form of socialism that can be justified in terms of Islamic principles and is in agreement with them. For example, land redistribution is in conformity with the Islamic precept that " The land is for whoever cultivates it ". The state control of major capital interest is justified by the law forbidding exploitation and usury. This equilibrium of Islamic modernism is a vital doctrine of Al-Azhar today. In secular writings it is exemplified in Taha Hussein's thesis that Islamic traditions must be revered and at the same time fed with Western ideas, and in Tawfiq al Hakim's advocacy of equilibrium between Islamic and Western thought. The post-revolutionary Egypt is a product of present conditions within the framework of an Islamic past, and the Egyptians are not inclined to



differentiate between the component parts of their ideology by calling some parts Islamic and others Western.

Another important social force besides religion is that of customs and traditions. Some of these were built up as a result of the agricultural environment of the Egyptians, and the circumstances which they had built up themselves, to which they had contributed or been exposed. An additional factor was the multitude of people of different racial stocks which accumulated in the Nile Valley. All these implanted in the Egyptian people a great variety of traditions which still exercise an obvious influence over the life of the individuals and the aspects of social relations and attachments.

As an example, one may take the vandetta. The Egyptians lived throughout their history in an atmosphere of hostility emanating from many quarters, against whose raids they had to defend themselves continuously ; and this tendency was undoubtedly intensified with the large scale incursions of bedouin tribes. In the play " Ughni al Mawt", the song of death, Tawfiq al Hakim portrays the vandetta: A widow asks her son, who is a student at the university, to avenge his father's death. She knows that his refusal means that he has to be killed by his own family, so that the next of kin can then pursue the feud. The play itself demonstrates that vandetta cannot be blamed merely on ignorance or a conflict of economic interests, but that its roots go deeper.

Besides, the Egyptian peasant, because of his attachment to the land, can hardly contemplate emigration, but has to remain firmly on his native land, as ' Abdul Rahman al Sharqāwī shows in Al Ard, "The land". The peasant's roots in his land are also depicted in Tawfiq al Hakin's Al Safqah, "The deal".

The deep conservatism of the Egyptians is also one of the forces which intensify the conflict between the old and the new. This conservatism is exemplified in the wide variety of clothing worn by the people, the customs of marriage and burial, and other social attachments. Even when an individual crosses a class barrier, he often clings to his previous customs. Family tensions often ensue, as in the play Al Nas illi Fuq, The people at the top, where one of the sisters has married a pasha, and the other remained in the middle class. The social climbing of the pasha's wife clashes with the feelings of her sister, who is content to remain where she is.

This then was the society of Egypt with which much contemporary drama concerns itself. The surface was stagnant, but <sup>in</sup> the levels below, reactions were taking place, producing forces that were to erupt and to shatter the surface and radically alter Egypt's appearance. A conflict was inevitable, and this conflict provided a fertile source of dramatic material, to which this study is devoted.



## CHAPTER TWO.

## New Developments in the National Life.

The changes in Egyptian society that have taken place over the last 100 years grew out of a compulsion to improve the environmental conditions in which Egyptians lived. The "false democracy" of Ismail's time brought an inevitable discontent, producing 'Urabi's revolt'. The foreign occupation was likewise a powerful stimulant for national feelings, which were merely temporarily suppressed without being eradicated after the crushing of 'Urabi's attempt, and which grew all the stronger for their suppression. It is significant that this period was a time of great increase in the strength of national movements.

The First World War naturally intensified political thought and activity and still further added impulse to Egyptian political consciousness, particularly as a result of the world-wide interest shown in the ideas of President Woodrow Wilson. The 1919 Revolution was a natural outcome of this accumulated nationalist feeling, and the failure of this revolution produced a characteristic phenomenon. Far from discouraging nationalist inspiration, frustration heightened them even more. In order to appreciate all these trends, which exerted a major influence on cultural life from the First World War onwards and inspired much contemporary Egyptian drama, it is necessary to trace their growth over

the period during which Egyptian society evolved to its present state.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Egyptian society underwent a transformation which was accelerated by the occurrences surrounding the French invasion ( 1798 - 1801 ). But at the same time, as a result of the system of agricultural monopoly imposed by Muhammad Ali in the first part of the nineteenth century, changes took place, notably the growth of feudalism, which introduced certain conditions which prevented peasants and workers from active participation in important aspects of national life. This delayed the co-operation between the popular base and the intelligentsia<sup>t</sup>, and for a time limited the activity of the latter only to narrow and short-sighted aims.

However, it was not beyond expectation that the "Egyptian peoples' repeated attempts to secure their rights might lead to results as conclusive as the French Revolution had done, or to a gradual development of constitutional reform as happened in England, had the French invasion not created a gap between Egypt's past and present. The reign of Muhammad Ali's dynasty, which came after the invasion, widened the gap, and it was possible that the people's energies would have been dissipated had the intelligentsia not been able to create a cultural revival, which precipitated 'Urabi's movement in the late ~~nineteen~~ <sup>eighteen</sup> seventies.



It is necessary here to stress an important historical fact. Although 'Urabi's revolution was not the first positive expression of the people's consciousness of their conditions and their desire for radical change in the political system that existed at the time, it afforded sufficient proof that the country was strongly determined to form and support an enlightened national leadership that would extricate it from the blind alley into which it had been led by absolute monarchy. Although no clear ideology had yet emerged, there was nevertheless a very strong expression of emotions on a national scale, which led the peasant women of Egypt to give away their ornaments for the success of the revolution, and made the whole nation serve the revolutionary leaders as heroes. The force of these emotions, which inspired the whole~~whole~~ country to a concerted effort, can be justifiably said to have fulfilled the function of an ideology, in being the source of considerable literary activity with a common ground of expression.

Although this revolution failed in its avowed aims, it was not in fact fruitless. For it succeeded in changing and developing the politically-conscious elements, so that the nationalism underwent a remarkable expansion, with Muṣṭafa Kāmil's movement and Sa'd Zaghlūl's revolution, culminating in the 1952 Revolution.

The effect of these new developments in the national life was to raise the people's national feelings and social consciousness, and to strengthen the solidarity of the newly

emerged middle class, which formed the main active, body of Egyptian society. We agree with 'Abdul Rahman er-Rāfi' I that 'Urabi's revolution " was not only a military revolution but also a nationalist one in which all classes participated; thus demonstrating that the people had not been defeated by the inevitable sequence of events and the inherited economical order, or by the social conditions prevalent under Muhammad Ali Pasha's dynasty.

The suggestion that 'Urabi wanted to establish a national republic can hardly be taken as mere individual ambition ; for 'Urabi and his group, consisting of educated and intelligent people, could identify themselves with the aspiration of the people. The educational development which flourished at the end of Ismail's reign enabled a remarkable number of educated Egyptians to reach the very top of the social hierarchy, which was occupied by potentates of Turkish or foreign extraction, and encouraged enlightened elements to go further in their attempt to establish the national dignity.

The cultural activity, which had been in progress in Egyptian life since the second decade of the nineteenth century, went on developing without being gravely affected by the failure of 'Urabi's revolution. The number of students

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- (1) M. Abu-hadīd, Za'in Misr al-Awal ( Al-Said 'Omar Markham p. 48  
 (2) Al-Thawanah al-'Urabiyyah; p.242.



at higher educational institutions increased gradually, and the National University of Cairo, was founded in 1908. The foundation of the first modern university in Egypt, which indicated a developed understanding of the function of education, led to a major change in outlook towards education and culture as a whole, and the following years witnessed the gradual expansion of the class of society which is now generally termed "intelligentsia". Sons of the fellaheen who graduated from the new university, Al Azhar, Dar al 'Ulūm and even from secondary schools joined the ranks of the new class of society which was largely responsible for the shape of later events. This class, also, produced a number of writers of not inconsiderable stature in all fields of contemporary Egyptian literature.

Mustafā Kāmil's national movement as well as the tribulation of the First World War raised the masses' political consciousness to the extent that all the strata of society eagerly answered the call of Sa'd Zaghlūl to rise against the occupying power (1919).

One can certainly agree with Arnold Kettle that successful revolutions effect thorough and revolutionary changes not only on the consciousness of the people but also on their social relations, outlook, philosophy and arts.<sup>(1)</sup> Although the 1919 revolution was not so successful, the statement of Kettle applies exactly to this revolution, which represents a turning-point in the history of contemporary Egypt.

(1) V. A. Kettle; *An Introduction to the English Novel*, p. 35

Abdul Rahmān al Rāfi'ī, who maintains that "the 1919 Revolution was not religious or social but political in the strict sense of the word", puts the question whether this revolution affected the moral outlook of the people or not, and on the whole feels that much of the effect was harmful. "Although the moral attitude, he argues, can be good or bad due to other factors unconnected with the revolution, the morality of the people in general degenerated after the Revolution.... The individual was defeated by a wave of opportunism". But he concedes, "The superior intellectual level resulted in increased keenness of observation ...". What ' Abdul Rahmān al Rāfi'ī has in mind when he speaks of "observation" is that an increasing number of people became more interested in social matters than they had ever been before, and were soon convinced that unless they were ruled by real constitutional government under pure Egyptian leadership, the state of social and political confusion would continue indefinitely.

However, even political revolutions never break out of a vacuum, and undoubtedly the social development of Egypt before the <sup>the First World War was one of the factors which contributed</sup> outbreak of the 1919 Revolution. This social <sup>to the</sup> development ~~was~~ even accelerated by the political and social failure of the revolution. Many influential societies were founded and made a remarkable contribution in educational

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- (1) Arnold Kettle ; An introduction to the English novel;  
p. 35  
(2) A. Al-Rafi'i; Thawnat Sanat 1919 ; p



social, economic and sporting activities. There were societies for the promotion of the feminist movement which played an important part in the fight against poverty and ignorance. Emancipated women such as Hudā Sha'rāwī and her disciples contributed a great deal to the general awakening of social consciousness in the slums of the capital as well as among the fellaheen. In the field of economics, "the logic of the revolution, which insisted on the economic factor, led to an economic development in spite of the completely passive attitude of the political leadership and the lack of support on the part of the Government". The foundation of Bank Misr with its economic and industrial organizations is illustrative of a certain measure of success.

The revolution also initiated the Egyptian Labour movement, through which each vocation and profession associated in a Trade Union of its own. The workers, the majority of whom came from the country, settled in the industrial districts and formed a typical proletarian milieu which then became the background of many social-purpose plays. The rising cost of living made the Egyptians, or rather a remarkable number among their many conservative families, accept the unusual spectacle of women working for a wage, and women workers appeared on the social scene for the first time in the history of modern Egypt.

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(1) A. Al-Rafi'i ; Thawrat Sanat 1919 ; p

Proletarian problems arose; the "three enemies of the people" raised their heads with the immense increase of population, and exacerbated the conflict between the classes. Social tension increased, and Communism found a ready breeding ground in the new proletarian milieu. There was also a labour party which was strongly suppressed by successive governments and, quite surprisingly, a royal prince was one of its leaders. This move failed to eliminate elements which could become dangerous for the established system, and the suppression of the labour party could only add fuel to the fire until the whole regime fell in 1952.

'Abdul Rahman al Rāfi'ī, an authority on modern Egyptian history and an eye-witness of the events of the 1919 Revolution, maintains that the spirit of this revolution "manifested itself particularly in the popular sectors". It is important to specify what he means by the term "popular sectors". They are the middle and the working classes whose ideology determined the character of contemporary Egyptian society.

It is important to note that it was the middle class which made the most outstanding contribution to culture in contemporary Egypt. One, however, would be shallow enough if one accepts the idea that the drama in contemporary Egypt has been written by "bourgeois writers for the bourgeois - class". Drama as part of "the body of intellectual and imaginative work... is always, and necessarily, something



more than the product of a single class, ... even with a society in which a particular class is dominant, it is evidently possible for members of other classes to contribute to the common stock, and for such contribution to be unaffected by or in ~~the~~ <sup>(1)</sup> opposition to the idea and values of the dominant class." It is also difficult to apply the terms "bourgeois-class" to the Egyptian middle class which always maintained very close links with the workers and the peasants.

Thus, within a comparatively short time, the middle class succeeded in establishing itself as the class most representative of Egyptian society, and was thus in the forefront of all its major development. This is best explained by the fact that the 1952 Revolution was the expression of the spirit and aspirations of the middle and working classes. Being directed against the supremacy of the economically and politically dominant class which was to all intents and purposes non-Egyptian, the spirit and consciousness of the middle class led it to assert the sovereignty of the Egyptian people.

It is important to notice that the inability of the Egyptian masses to reduce the overwhelming power of the economically dominant class was initially due to their defective education and confused ideologies. But the steadily increasing number of educated people, who worked essential changes in all the processes of Egyptian life, enhanced the ability of the middle and working classes to

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(1) V. R. Williams: *Culture and Society*; p. 308.

play in society a role similar to that of their Western counterparts.

It is a fact that the economic and political system in the first part of the twentieth century did not materially differ from that of the nineteenth century. But it must be borne in mind that the new patterns, which emerged in the field of industry and commerce, the constitutional system and the struggle between politicians who now had to find supporters among the masses were all in favour of the cultural and social development led by the middle class.

To begin with, the competition on the part of the middle class was negligible, so that there was, at first no open conflict. But gradually, after the 1922 Declaration of Independence, this class managed to obtain some of the key positions in the Government of the country. However the means used by politicians were far from good, and created what Tawfiq al Hakīm calls  
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 " the tendency to personal promotion."

The 1919 Revolution, being political in the strict sense of the word, did not alarm the upper classes of the feudalist-capitalist coalition, since they succeeded in safeguarding their interests and domination through holding fast to false democracy and executive power. Since it was impossible to suppress the "Dangerous movement",

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(1) V. his book 'Mashah al Mugtama', p. 7



they tried to neutralise it and render it harmless by becoming its' leaders; this is one of the reasons why the 1919 Revolution failed to achieve any basic social reform. For the upper classes managed to frustrate many repeated attempts to impose the will of the masses on the governing class. The feudalists and capitalists left the Wafd party, which was thought to represent the masses, and consolidated themselves in the so called "Ḥizb al Ahrār al Dusturiyyin ", the Constitutional Liberal Party, whose aims were, in fact, totally reactionary. At a later stage reactionary elements changed their tactics, infiltrated the Wafd Party, and were thus able to emasculate it.

The economic system of the country was thus dominated by one class, and remained in this condition until the fall of the regime in 1952. The influence of this economic fact on the social and spiritual conditions of the country is unmistakable. There is a connection between the political disappointment which resulted from the failure of the revolution and the melancholic mood which determined the literary bulk of the 1930's. Two intrinsically melancholic tendencies, escapism and tortured romanticism, are very characteristic of Egyptian writings of that period.

When we consider the social changes leading up to the 1919 Revolution, the effect of this revolution itself

and the changes which it brought about, we are led to the conclusion that it was the initiator of the contemporary Egyptian society and its dramatic expression with which this study concerns itself. For it was at this time that the literary genres of play and novel consolidated themselves in their present form. As were the social changes of the period, so the literary developments also were only in embryonic form prior to 1919; they took firm shape only after that time. Thus we are justified in concluding that contemporary Egyptian society and contemporary Egyptian drama were fully born immediately after 1919.

With regard to the effect of the 1952 Revolution on Egyptian drama, it is justifiable to say that this has not yet been fully felt, and that even the extent to which an effect has taken place is hard to estimate. For many themes , even in plays written after 1952, reflect ~~to~~ the mentality and values of conscious people in Egypt before the revolution. Nevertheless, in the later stages it has become obvious that the revolution and the new ideology which it produced were having a very profound influence on the attitude and way of thinking of individuals in society, and this could not help effecting their cultural expression.

As an example of the "popularization" of content,



let us consider Nu'mān 'Ashūr. His play "The people below" is a denial of the concept of the social ladder, in which the old society had taken a smug pride. Nu'man 'Ashur condemned the idea of climbing to the " top of the pyramid, and wished instead to level it out. This more radical view of social equality was characteristic of post-revolutionary thinking.

It is also interesting that the first impulse of writers after the revolution was to "popularize" their plays, both in "form" and "content", and to write them in Egyptian colloquial Arabic. So strong was this trend that even Tawfiq al Hakim, accustomed to writing in classical Arabic, attempted to evolve a compromise between classical and colloquial speech as in his play " Al Safqah ", The Deal.

The plays written within the early period after 1952 voiced an outspoken discontent with the class problems that existed under the monarchy. But with the passing of time, plays become less frankly political, and tended to develop an attitude of artistic expression, as exemplified by Rashād Rushdī.

Nu'mān 'Ashūr, in his " Al Nās illi Fūq ", the people at the top, devastatingly exposes the aristocracy as completely decadent and worthless, with no place in the new society. Yet in the last line of this play, he

gives the impression that this matter is closed, that the past should be buried and left in peace like Cervantes' hero Don Quixote. This corresponds with Egyptian feeling that the former members of the aristocracy can be dismissed as no longer dangerous.

Perhaps the greatest contrast between plays written before and after the revolution lay in the demands of the audience. Before 1952, the public mood was largely echoed by the Yūsuf Wahbī melo-dramas and the bitter comments of Nagib al Raihani. But after the revolution the public demanded that depth be substituted for bitterness, and also required a profound analysis of the whole society rather than an exposure of the problem facing individual lives as a result of the social environment.

An instance of the more profound attitude to drama in post-revolutionary society can be found in Rashad Rushdi's *Iu'bat al Hub*, *The game of love*. The playwright goes deeply into a serious problem of Egyptian society; the emotional immaturity arising from a hypocritical attitude towards sexual relationships. The daughter of the family is not emotionally mature because of her mother's and brother's refusal to accept that she should have even the slightest acquaintance with a man before marriage ; neither can the brother be considered a sound personality, because society's acceptance of a man's



immorality let him slip into adulterous relationships.

It is clear from the above that throughout this period the changes in the society exerted a powerful influence on drama, which was used very much as the society's outlet. Even the mistakes and the social evil of that period can be described as beneficial, since it gave rise to a healthy reaction, which probably found its liveliest expression in the drama of social criticism. We shall endeavour to trace whether this mood of honest criticism in fact produced a constructive social theory.

## Chapter Three.

Growth and Development of Drama  
in Contemporary Egypt.

It is my belief that the birth of contemporary Egyptian drama came shortly after, and largely as a result of the events surrounding the 1919 Revolution. There were certainly attempts before that time to bring an Egyptian drama into being, but these produced works that were classical both in themes, which were based largely on those of European classical drama, and in form, which was bound by mainly classical Arabic literary conventions. These works thus did not fit into the pattern of contemporary Egyptian drama, and it is necessary to make a distinction between the pre-1919 poetical drama and the drama written after that time which set the style of dramatic material in contemporary Egypt.

Much as might have been expected, the flourishing of poetry in the latter part of the 19th century did not lead to the emergence of drama in Egypt on a large scale. This flourishing of poetry was brought about by the spirit of an age of major political development, and filled with many notable events. the birth of the parliament in 1866, the promulgation of a modern



constitution in 1879, and as the climax, Urābī's revolution in 1881. Behind the development lies, also, a great cultural resurgence stimulated and sustained by the return of members of the missions sent to Europe by Muhammad 'Alī and Ismā'īl, as well as by graduates of Dār al 'ulūm and Madrasat al Alsun ; the former of these institutes revived the classical heritage of Jāhilī and Islamic literature, while the latter engaged in the translation of Western works. From this contact of Egyptian men of learning with these two separate cultural sources, new patterns began to emerge. This led to a considerable increase in the learning of the art, and humanities, at the same time liberating Arabic literary style from rigid conventions accumulated over past centuries, and gave a power to the Arabic language to describe new conditions. From this influx of fresh intellectual material, and from the rebirth of the language one might have expected Egyptian drama to have emerged at the end of the 19th or the beginning of the 20th century, but this did not occur. What materialized was merely the poetical drama of Ahmad Shawqī.

The number of plays written by Ahmad Shawqī, at the turn of the 19th century, are an extension of a remarkable movement in Arabic literature in the second

half of that century of which the leading figure is Maḥmūd Sāmi al Bārūdī, and which was founded on ancient Arabic poetry. This movement did not include drama, since this genre was unknown in classical Arabic literature ; the main stress was put on the emotional and political aspects of the traditional qasīda. This poetry was mainly subjective, and the general situation of the country following the collapse of the 'Urābī revolution favoured the introverted attitude which was mirrored in the greater part of the poetic output<sup>of</sup> that time. This attitude invaded the poetical drama of Ahmad Shawqī, where the poet's own feelings figure prominently to the almost entire exclusion of characterisation and plot. Lyrical monologues stretch over pages of this singular type of drama, and the traditional form of the qasīda, impressed upon the mind of the poet as the only admissible poetic form, hampered the dramatic technique at every step. This is true not only of the form, but also of the content, which to a great extent reflects the poet's individual inspiration and his ambition to inject the Western genre of poetical drama into the Arabic framework of the qasīda. Moreover, Ahmad Shawqī's poetical dramas are too isolated a phenomenon in Arabic literature to be considered the



beginning of dramatical development which materialised in prose. The conditions for such a development were not propitious, and two more decades elapsed before the modern Arabic drama emerged immediately after the 1919 Revolution.

The bulk of dramatic literature of the 1920's was, however, deeply rooted in the attempts made by the previous generation not in drama itself, but in novels, short stories and essays devoted to, or rather greatly concerned with, social analysis and criticism, which are, in some of the characteristics, akin to drama. The tendency towards social criticism, is represented by Al Muwailhī's Ḥadīth 'Isā ibn Hishām, Al Manfalūti's Al 'Abarāt, and Haikal's Zainab. Being the product of different social conditions, these works were determined by the process of life in the early twentieth century; they were superficial in their criticism, and only evinced sympathy for the poor, attacked fossilized traditions, and were philanthropic in their approaches. In all that they were harking back to the past.

One of the modern literature's main characteristics is a sensitivity to social conditions and a tendency to social criticism. We agree with Dr. Tāhā Hussain when he says that modern Arabic literature, which is one of the sources of the contemporary literary revival in

Egypt, is no exception to this rule. The events in Egypt in recent times which we have mentioned above intensified this sensitivity and, although the spirit of criticism was essentially political in expression, it was inevitably extended to the social field.

However, literary phenomena do not occur in a vacuum, and there are distinct contemporary influences of social, political and economic kind. Nor are such literary phenomena isolated from other activities ; the contemporary dramatic movement is closely linked with the modern mood which emerged almost simultaneously and is exemplified in the modern mass media. In the large number of periodicals and literary magazines, and even in the radio, the stress was put on social criticism ; the same was the case with the daily press. This had great effect on the prevailing public mood. One of the most beneficial of these effects was that by the constitutional system, a flourishing literary revival was in progress.

Egyptian scholars and men of letters engaged in never-ending discussions on literary criticism and economic, social and political theories ; perhaps for the first time in Egyptian history men like Lutfī as and Tāhā Husain began to consider, and even attack,

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(1) Taha Hussein, *Khisan wa Naqd*, V. pp. 41-71.



social defects, and to demand social and political reform. This was the starting-point of introspective self-criticism, and later led to a remarkable line of development in contemporary Egyptian literature which put the emphasis on "critical realism".

The repeated attempts to raise the political and social consciousness of the people resulted in an actual change in the national character; the complete abolition of the veil and the emancipation of women produced an entirely new type of Egyptian woman, and gradually the people became aware of the fact that they ought to be masters in their own land and of their national destiny. Although the 1919 Revolution was economically and socially unsuccessful, it was successful in that it awakened national consciousness and helped to create the new process of life which urged a large number of playwrights, novelists and political leaders to identify themselves with the people's aspirations.

If one is permitted to leave aside the two plays written, about 1920, by Muḥammad Taynūr, *Al-Usfūr fi al-Afas* and 'Abdel-Sattar Effendy, one can see that two playwrights who proved to be major figures of the new type of Egyptian Drama, Tawfiq al Hakim , who showed

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great enthusiasm for the theatre and wrote, in 1919, his first critical comedy, *Al Daif al Thaqīl* ( The oppressive guest ), a pleasant comedy in tune with the taste exemplified by Muhammad, was known for a long time as the novelist who wrote 'Awdat al Rūh, 'Uṣfūr min al Sharq and *Yawniyyat Naib fil Aryaf*. Mahmūd Taymūr has been mainly concerned with short stories and novels, and has drawn much of his inspiration, as did others in the literary movement, from French and Russian writers.

#### The Vogue of Grecian Themes.

Being under the spell of Greek drama and the influence of his classical studies in Paris, Tawfiq al Ḥakīm adopted, in the late 1920's, the idea that the newly born Egyptian drama ought to be based on, or rather linked with the traditions of Greek drama. For him Western playwrights had been able to lay down the foundation of drama in modern times because of their wide knowledge of Greek drama.<sup>(1)</sup>

Tawfiq al Hakim's first attempt in this direction was the play *Oedipus*. But was the basis of Greek tragedy, the belief that man's destiny is ruled by malevolent external forces, compatible with Muslim thought ?

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(1) Tawfiq al-Hakīm ; ~~V. The introduction to his play,~~

The principles on which Islamic society has been based do not admit of the assumption of an evil fate which dominates humanity. Thus an essential facet of the tragic sense is lacking. 'Izz ed Dīn Ismā'īl attributes the previous absence of *daran* in Arabic literature to this.<sup>(1)</sup> In evidence he quotes the story of 'Abdul Muttalib who was required to sacrifice his son ' Abdullah ( the Prophet's father ), and finally 'Abdullah's life was spared by drawing lots, and camels were sacrificed in his stead. 'Izz ed Din Isma'il points to this story as fine material for a tragedy which the Arabs had never used owing to their lack of the tragic sense. (1)

It is undeniable that 'Izz ed Dim Isma'il has made a valid observation, and that the tragic sense of Greek classical drama is irreconcilable with Islamic values. But this - not to say that there is no place for tragedy in the Islamic cultural heritage. For there may be another basis to tragedy besides the Greek belief in a malevolent fate : the selfishness and weakness of man and his unwillingness to follow God's law, for example. This is perfectly acceptable to the Muslim frame of mind, and the history of Islam abounds

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(1) Cf. Al-Masrah al Falsafi; Ph.D., Thesis, 1959,  
(faculty of Arts.  
(3) Ain Shams University, first chapter.



with such themes which provide excellent tragic material. Indeed this sort of approach has been developed to some extent by the Shi'is in their Muharran plays on the death of Al-Husain. It should be possible for tragedies to be constructed within the framework of Islam's traditional values, from themes such as the crucifixion of Al Hallāj, the life of the mad Fatimad al Hakim, or the story of the Manlūks, puppet 'Abbasid Caliph who died on his pathetic expedition to recapture Baghdad after the Mongol invasion.

Furthermore, it is impossible that the Arabs, with their very turbulent history, should be totally lacking in any form of tragic sense. The mystery goes deeper than this. Why did the Arabs, who were perfectly familiar with all aspects of Greek culture, reject drama as a whole until very recent times ? They developed all other spheres of Greek culture, and their society was as well equipped as that of Greece and Rome for the production of drama. This is a question in which there is great scope for future research. The assumption that the Arabs lacked the tragic sense is thus questionable, and it is relevant here to re-examine and to re-define the whole concept of tragedy.

In my view, tragedy is an art form designed to stir up the audience's emotion to an extreme pitch. to achieve this, the tragedian uses the means that are often far-fetched, and elements in his plot that are unrelated to the realities of life, since his sole purpose is to attain an extreme of feeling, regardless of realistic considerations. The aim of the tragedian, in rousing this feeling may be to demonstrate man's incompetence and defeatism, and his subjection to destructive forces ; whether external, as the Greek supernatural agencies, or internal, as the human emotions in certain tragedies of the European classical period. But, in all cases, he satisfies something in his audience arising from man's condition of defeatism or lack of understanding. The appeal of tragedy to the public is that it provides an escape from a sense of responsibility. Fate is a very convenient excuse for human weakness, and human beings have an element of wishing to see someone more unfortunate than themselves. Thus the tragedian finds it easier to create a communion between himself and his audience than does the author of comedy or the modern type of drama - often a mixture of tragic and comic elements - since the audience possesses the tragic sense in a latent form, and he needs only to heighten it. This tragic

sense is what gives classical tragedies a sort of immortality.

When we consider this, we gain a new insight into the reason for the decline of European tragedy to the point of senility in the twentieth century. <sup>(1)</sup> At this time the people of Europe were at the zenith of their power and self confidence. Their development of science and their material strength made them feel masters of their own destiny, and removed their inclination for tragedy in the traditional form. In a society where self-confidence is high and the people feel that they are in control of their future, tragedy can find little or no response, for the mood of thought and action is unpropitious. In other words, tragedy died at the beginning of the 20th century before the First World War, because of the prevailing mood of positivity. At present, while individuals often appreciate classical tragedies, there is no demand by society for conventional playwrights.

When we come to the question why Arabic literature did not produce tragedy, we can discount three causes that some critics have suggested for this fact. The first is the Bedouin way of life, since drama did not

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(1) In his valuable book, "The Playwright and thinker Eric Bentley mentions this fact, but no attempt is made to explain it. See p. 167



appear even in the Umayyad and Abbasid times, when the Arabs had built up a developed urban civilization. Likewise we may discount Arab rejection of the values of tragedy on the grounds of principle, since the Arabs also wrote no comedy. Thirdly, it is an error to maintain that religion actively prevented the emergence of tragedy, since there was no form of censorship in Abbasid times, and men were free to write even un-Islamic doctrines gleaned from Greek philosophy.

This leads us to reconsider the assumption of the Arab lack of tragic sense, in a new light. We must consider this in the terms of two main periods. The Arab of the Jahiliyya period, although a pagan, had a very different attitude from that of the ancient Greek. The pagan Arab did not really take their Gods very seriously and had little or no sense of continuous divine interference in human life which was so characteristic of the Greek attitude. Likewise they gave little thought to an afterlife and took death lightly, holding that it was an honourable thing to be killed in battle for the glory of one's tribe or in defence of one's honour and dignity. Finally the Bedouin was and still is, a man of action, conscious of his own strength, virility and self-sufficiency. The idea that he was not responsible for his own actions, or did

not control his destiny, would have<sup>been</sup>/repugnant to his concept of muruwwa ( manliness ).

These characteristics of positiveness and action were modified and strengthened by the rise of Islam. The Arabs, and Muslims in general, were infused with a spirit of OPTIMISM, and a sense of responsibility for the ethics of their deeds. The nobility attached to martyrdom prevented fear of death, and beyond death lay a higher life for the true believer. There was little room here, evidently, for the Greek type of tragic sense.

However, Greek drama did not produce only tragedy but also comedy. The latter type of drama is the product of a more developed state of society than the former, since its basis is critical rather than emotional and it has its roots in political and social consciousness. Greek society was particularly suited to this, since it had developed in a democratic form, and each individual was accustomed to consider matters relating to government and society his legitimate field of concern. Consequently, the spirit of criticism was widespread.

Conditions in Arab society were rather different. In Jahili times, it was both anarchic and tribal. There was an intense spirit of individualism which,

however, became submerged, when expedient, in the will of the community. The Arab was completely free as long as he did not violate the standards of his community, in which event he would become a social outcast. Thus social criticism would have been irrelevant. After the rise of Islam, much of this basic mentality remained, except that the tribal community was replaced, though not permanently, by the larger community of Islam. After the rise of dynastic systems the conduct of affairs lay in the hands of one man, the Caliph, and it would have been highly improper for citizens to attempt public criticism. Indeed, it became accepted by society at that time that politics was no business of the ordinary man. In such a society, any ideas that were expressed found their outlet through the preacher rather than the writer of tragedy or comedy.

It is the Greek citizen's participation in all social and political affairs that made the emergence and popularity of comedy natural, whereas the Arab worked hard to wait until conditions within it had changed to the point where social criticism was produced. Then comedy came forth, and drama in contemporary Arabic literature contains elements of both comedy and tragedy.

It is also relevant to add that the time of the



birth of drama in contemporary Egypt was one of rising political and social consciousness and the prevailing mood was realism. Also the modern type of drama, with its combination of tragic and comic elements was doubtless more suitable than the pure comedy or tragedy of Greece. Thus, it was not specifically a lack of tragic sense which prevented the Arabs from developing drama earlier, but rather a combination of factors in the character and development of their society.

The assumption that the basis of Greek classical drama is irreconcilable with the values of Islamic communities can, however, be traced in Tawfiq al Hakim's interpretation of Oedipus' tragedy which is entirely coloured by his Islamic mentality. The malevolence of fate, the supernatural interference which leads man to ruin, has been eliminated, and all the events are occasioned by a typically human agency : Teresias, who wishes to replace a hereditary monarchy with a king of his choice, suggests to Phillip's mind that he will die by his son's hand. There is no Olympian inspiration for this prophecy, but only an everyday mortal motive of political theory. This motive is to prove the dominance of a human being's will. Phillip heeds the warning, and tries to dispose off his son, who is spared

by the shepherd intended to kill him. But the son Oedipus returns to discover his origin, thus introducing an unseen factor in Teresias's plans. By this means, Al Hakīm demonstrates that human will has power within a limited circle enclosed by <sup>the</sup> all-embracing will of God. Oedipus also meets a lion, not a miraculous animal as in Sophocles' version. He then kills his father, marries his mother and takes over the throne with the aid of Teresias' conspiracy, without the latter knowing his real identity. Oedipus is in turn overthrown later by Teresias. Tawfiq āl Hakin's treatment of Oedipus is concerned only with human agents ; the events unfold as a result of a commonplace political plot, without any external interference, other than the coincidence of Oedipus' return.

#### Intellectual Drama.

Playwrights and novelists turned, in the late 1920's and 1930's, from the values created by the "unholy alliance of feudalism and capitalism" and took refuge in " the ivory tower " of contemplation or imagination, handling abstract subjects or writing romantic and historical novels. This tendency nearly killed the drama which had flourished in the 1920's. The difficulties of putting the intellectual drama

on the stage were immense at the time.(1). The theatre survived in this period due to the commercial plays, some of which even possessed considerable worth and were to some extent, instrumental in moulding the Egyptian character. This escapist tendency, one might say, is comparable to French trends between 1830 and 1850, which are considered a reaction to conditions similar to those existing in Egypt in the early 1930's.

It is necessary to notice that it is not only my intention here to deal with intellectual drama in great detail, since this task has been most ably and fully performed earlier by 'Izz ed Din Isma'il = I shall only consider in so far as it is necessary within the scope of this study of drama and society in contemporary Egypt.

Tawfīq al Ḥakīm, the representative of the intellectual drama in Egypt, began his literary career during the First World War, as a playwright with social interest. His two earlier plays *Ad Daif ath Thaqil*, the Oppressive Guest, ( 1918-19), and

(1) In this book, *Fi al Adab el Miṣry el Mu'asir*, Prof. Al Qutt makes a full analysis of Tawfīq al Ḥakīm's intellectual plays. In his opinion, these plays are unsuitable from the point of view of acting. See his study p.p. 46-115

(=) *Al Masrah al Falsafi* ; Ph.D., Thesis 1959



al Mar-ah al Gadidah, the New Woman ( 1923-24) - are deeply involved in social situations, and even his 'Awdat ur Ruh, the Return of the Spirit, (1927), though it expresses his first romantic feelings and ideas preserved during his Bohemian life in Paris, is a good achievement in the field of the social novel. He, however, turned his back on social problems or, as he himself says, left the atmosphere of national problems behind to go ahead to the wider horizon of Man. This was in 1928, the year whose events showed the failure of constitutional governments, and foreshadowed the impending democratic crisis in Egypt.

Tawfiq al Hakim thus turned to the intellectual drama, and wrote Ahlul Kahf ( The sleepers in the cave) Shahrazad, Al Khuruj min al Jannah ( Exodus from Paradise ) and Nahr ul Junun ( The Stream of Madness). One must bear in mind that this was about the time when cinema invaded Egypt and created conditions which were unpropitious for the theatre. It is known that the cinema affected drama in Western countries where the theatre had already established itself and taken deep root in Western society.(1) . This may sustain a conclusion that the growth of the intellectual drama

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(1) Eric Bentley ; The playwright and Thinker;P.9

can also be linked with the difficulties which were facing the theatre in Egypt at the time.

It is important to maintain that Al Hakim's decision, in the years round 1930, to leave behind social-purpose drama and devote himself to the intellectual drama was partly influenced by his contact with European works of this nature ( Ibsen, Pirandell and Shaw ), and partly also by conditions in his own social environment in Egypt. It is possible to accuse him of escapism in that he often uses symbolism or allegory in his work ; nevertheless, this change can only be justified if the plots of his dramatic work are in fact irrelevant to the problems of his society. Where symbolism or allegory is used to express a fact of everyday life it can hardly be called escapism. On the contrary, it is deeply involved in the realities of the mundane.

If we analyse deeply the ideological questions facing Egypt and the content of Al Hakim's intellectual plays, we find an important correlation between them. As an example, we may take his play Ahlul Kahf, the story of the "seven" sleepers. This has been misinterpreted as a philosophical dissertation on the concept of time. In fact **it is** a play with a "message", designed to lift the people of

Egypt out of their disastrous habit of dwelling in the past; a tendency which Al Hakin considered far more dangerous than a mere fruitless nostalgia, for he felt that it was leading his country to national suicide. Brisco, the girl who buried herself alive with Mishilina, the man from the past whom she loved is, to Tawfiq al Hakin, the symbol of fruitlessness of the mood from which his compatriots were suffering. There is a similar motive in the play Shahrazad : to arouse the Egyptians out of their habit of day dreaming and to make them adopt a realistic approach. For Shahriyar, in his inability to come to terms with reality, completely fails as a man. Nahr ul Junun, which should be included in his intellectual plays, is typical of many of Al Hakin's plays in that it presents a moral on more than one level, through symbolism. A good king dreams that black snakes emerge from the river which runs through his kingdom. The soothsayers interpret this as meaning that a curse has been placed on the river, and all who drink from it become insane. In a short time, every one in the country, except the king and his prime minister, have drunk from the river. The populace, in their madness, are deluded that they are sane and that it is the king and the prime minister who have lost their reason. Finally these two men



conclude in a dialogue that reason is a faculty judged by the yardstick of the society in which they live, and that their only solution is to drink the water also.

Al Hakim wrote this play in <sup>the</sup> 1930's, the time when Egyptian society was sunk in a mood of despair and escapism. The dilemma which he presents here is that of the Egyptian intellectuals, the men of sound mind in a society that has lost its reason. Should they give up <sup>the</sup> struggle to guide society, and submerge themselves in the lethal mood which they are opposing, as the king and the prime minister did ?

There is also a message on a deeper level, which applies to humanity as a whole. In the occult symbolism which Al Hakim uses so effectively, the river of snakes is the Qliphoth of the Qabbala, the infernal regions of the human mind.(1) . The power of evil holds sway in the life of this world, and man has not succeeded in overcoming it. Should a man of high morality be rigid in his resistance to it ? Or should he give way to the insidiousness of evil, because it is normal and dominant in the society to which he belongs.

One is bound to explain why this study is devoted in very great detail to the work of Tawfiq al Hakim. It is because he is the most outstanding playwright

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(1). V. Jung ; Psychology and Alchemy ; Vol. 12.F

of contemporary Egypt and surpasses all others in the depth and variety of his ideas and themes. He has had a more decisive influence on life and habits of thought among the modern Egyptians, and has achieved this very largely through what he calls his concept of equilibrium to which we shall now devote our attention.

P L A Y W R I G H T S



## CHAPTER FOUR

(86)

Tawfiq al Hakīm.

His concept of equilibrium.

There is sufficient evidence that Tawfiq al Hakīm, in handling intellectual and social themes, follows a certain concept which stresses the necessity of what he terms "equilibrium" in life. (Al-T'aduliyya). This concept springs, or rather, is sustained by a common ground that he shares with the majority of contemporary Egyptian thinkers, especially those who are aware of the major change resulting from the impact between West and East. The poise and consciousness with which Al Hakīm confronts the problems of our age derives from his intermediate position between the two civilizations as well as from his strong belief in equilibrium, and deep knowledge of what are, and what are not, fundamentals.

The fact that Tawfiq al Hakīm's literary output is affected and even determined by the principle of equilibrium is easily observable and sometimes quite obvious in his earlier works. Later he formulated this concept in a critical work under the title of Al-T'adulīyah (Equilibrium). This is by no means a personal tendency; it stems from the orientation of Eastern society in general, and of Islamic society in particular, from which he derives his deeply rooted belief in the supernatural, and which established a

perfect equilibrium between the spiritual and the material.

The belief in the supernatural world and its active participation in the events of this world was deeply rooted in pre-Islamic Egypt , and was not abolished ,but kept in bounds after the advent of Islam. In the Qur'an itself , angels intervene in conflicts and battles. King Solomon's magic ring which gave him power over the Jinn has become a part of a Muslim's belief , and has remained the motive of thousands of folk-tales which are, even nowadays , implicitly believed by a large section of the public. Magic , alchemy , and conjuring practices as represented in the Arabian Nights were typical of the mental attitude of oriental society until the early twentieth century , and against them the Muslim 'Ulama as well as other thinkers conducted a long struggle.

Beside this attitude towards the supernatural , there is the rationalist one which , being at the other extreme , is entirely different from that of the early Muslims , and contends that what cannot be proved by reasoning does not exist , so that it would be futile to be overmuch concerned about it. Consequently, the usual logical methods are applied to problems like the existence of God. This attitude emerges over and over in the 1930's , especially among the youth , whenever conditions are propitious , and has led to

atheism and agnosticism. This excessive rationalist attitude led certain groups , such as the Muslim Brotherhood , to reject Western civilisation or , at least , to adopt a hostile attitude towards it . More enlightened groups hold to both Eastern and Western civilizations. They are also aware of the fact that equilibrium is about to be thrown out of balance by the continued impact of Western civilisation which may tip the scale in favour of materialism.

For Tawfiq al Hakīm , the more urgent duty was to restore the equilibrium between the world of reality and the world of dreams in which the oriental mind used to live and revel. Shahrazad , one of his earlier plays, is a serious attempt in that direction. It begins at the end of the final night of the Arabian Nights, which symbolises , to the playwright , the world of dreams. Thus King Shahriyar is led to the line where the world of dreams ends and the path of reality begins and left there to find the way for himself. But Shahriyar loses touch with reality , suspended as he is , in Shahrazad's words , between heaven and earth , and it is obvious that his failure is due to his inability to establish an equilibrium between the two worlds ; the world of reality and the world of dreams. It is interesting to observe the comparison of Shahriyar and Shahrazad with another



two modern characters. In the play 'Anan', whose events and characters are from contemporary Egyptian society, 'Anan' the heroine is dominated by the character of the other 'Anan' who lived in the 'Abbasid' era, and tries to make her husband an artist. The efforts of the two wives succeed although the result is hardly a happy one, for in 'Anan's' case, her husband takes to a monkish existence, while Shahriyar ceases to be a reasonable man, or rather loses the substantial characteristics of balanced human beings. Tawfiq al Ḥakīm's intention here is to show the necessity of a sense of proportion and an equilibrium in actual life.

A further extension of Tawfiq al Ḥakīm's tendency towards equilibrium is his advocacy that it be applied between mind and heart; by the latter he means the instinctive and emotional promptings towards a solution. This idea is noticeable throughout Al Ḥakīm's work from the very beginning. 'Awdat al Rūn contains long passages, almost amounting to essays on the importance of the "heart", which are very characteristic of this novel. It was during his stay in France that he realised the need for a balance, as can be seen from his work 'Usfūr min al Sharq, "A Bird from the East", which stresses the conflict of the ideas of East and West.

Even in one of his latest plays, Ashwāk al-Salām, (The Thorns of Peace), he believes that "the way to peace  
 -1-  
 is in the heart". Likewise he is inclined to think that "reasonable justifications are sometimes the thorns that stab the heart, and causes disturbance to its tranquility, for the intellect doubts, and when one doubts, he loses the half of the heart which he wishes to gain; the intellect becomes timorous, and one would not meet those whom  
 -2-  
 he loves while he fears them.

The play "Sulayman al-Hakīm" also concerns itself with the question of equilibrium. This time between the material and the spiritual. The playwright demonstrates that the material cannot dominate the spiritual, for Solomon uses all the material power at his command to conquer the heart of Balkis and fails, in exactly the same degree in which Qamar fails to win Shahrazad through the purely spiritual power of love. Neither the material nor the spiritual aspect is effective by itself: only when they are combined can success be achieved. The failure of the hero to attain this form of equilibrium is also brought out in some other plays which approach the central problem from different directions.

-3-

In his latest play Yā Tali' esh-Shagara, (Thou Who Art Climbing the Tree), Tafiq al Hakīm places the emphasis, in more than one context, on the idea that intellect alone

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(1) Ashwak al-Salam; p. 76      (2) ibid. p. 78.

(3) Published in 1962.

has its limitations, and is not able to provide the answer to all problems. For him, the existence of transcendental things "must be felt and guessed rather than discovered", and it would be useless to resort, in the inquiry, to ordinary logical methods of deduction and induction. This equilibrium between intellect and instinct is essentially a more accurate reflection of Islamic doctrine, which commands its followers to look into their conscience if intellect does not provide an answer. This also corresponds to the Islamic concept of the harmonious working of intellect with divine revelation.

However, the play approaches the problem of equilibrium from the opposite direction to that used in Al Hakim's earlier works. While his aim in "Shahrazad" was to awaken the mind of the Arab nation from its drugged obsession with the world of dreams, he now attempts to reverse the process. The Arabs were by now so drastically awakened that they might become obsessed with materialism, an equally dangerous extreme. Thus, Al Hakim strives to reawaken in his audience a consciousness of the supernatural and the world of dreams.

This he does by revealing some of the hidden recesses of the human mind - a region hitherto so unexplored that scientists have only just begun to grapple with the vital



task of differentiating between the scientific truth and superstition, - and wanting people to realise that within the symbolism of alchemy, for example , lies a profound psychological validity. This play is therefore an attempt to restore the equilibrium , and to readjust a pendulum that has swung too far. In the epilogue to this play , Al Ḥakīm says : " Man's behaviour in this world is very strange. He always asks and ~~ex~~pects a definite answer to every question. If the universe remains silent and does not provide the answer , he will be entitled to think that it lacks sense and purpose. He wants to have the world destroyed unless he is given a frank answer, but the world is destroyed only in his eyes , for it remains as it was , saying nothing , though it says everything<sup>-1-</sup> ".

-2-

In "Isis" , he gives an able illustration of the relevance of equilibrium by posing some bold and prominent questions concerning the human predicament : What is the future of humanity ? Is it in rising to the purity of angels or in remaining human ; in struggling to find an equilibrium between idealism and realism , and in emerging from this equilibrium with a nobler aim and better life ? Do lofty aims materialise on earth,

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( 1 ) Ya Yatali' esh Shagara; p.25

( 2 ) Published in the late 1950's.

among humanity , through human means ? Is the difference between men and angels that the angels know only one fact of existence ; idealism , whereas men know two things ; idealism and realism , and cannot detach themselves from reality while going towards a higher ideal ? What are the responsibility and message of the writer as a thinker ? Is it to hold fast to idealism , as Mastas does , or to hold fast to realism as Thuth is finally induced to do ? In the play itself , the measure of success of the three main characters is their ability to find the right balance. Mastas , the idealist who maintains that action must proceed according to right and justice , fails in the same degree as his adversary who professes the principle that the end justifies the means. Only Isis who observes just the right mixture of theory and practice , idealism and realism , succeeds in attaining her objective. The necessity of equilibrium comes out from the question : What should Isis have done to secure her son's right ? Should she have done what she did ( gaining the help of Shaikh al Balad in a conspiracy to induce Tyfūn to accept the people's judgment ) or should she have held fast to her husband's idealism and principles , and exposed her son to the danger of defeat ?

These questions reveal what Al Hakim means by equilibrium in this context. At the same time he does not



answer any one of them directly , but leaves the audience to ponder on them . His concept of equilibrium is explicit in his works as a whole. For him , Man can reconcile eternal and external paradoxes into equilibrium alone.

*m* In many of his social-purpose plays , Tawfiq al Ḥakīm also attaches great importance to this principle of equilibrium. For example , in *Al Aidi al Na'inah* ( soft hands ) , he has two themes of equilibrium running parallel to each other : equilibrium between social classes that are in conflict , and between what is theoretical and what is practical. For him , the solution of class difficulties can be realised through reconciliation rather than struggle for the aristocracy are simply human beings , whose arrogance and other failings are caused not by deliberate malice, but by misunderstanding of the lower classes. In this play the Prince , by mixing with the common people, comes to understand them and appreciate their virtues. At the same time , his personal practical experiences give him an insight into society which would be completely lacking in a man whose knowledge was purely theoretical. This enlightened attitude is also attained by the Prince's two daughters , one of whom marries an engineer of "peasant" stock. The fact that they share in common a progressive and revolutionary outlook enables them



to form a happy partnership. The ex-princess , by casting off mistaken ideas of her upbringing , shows through her tolerance the way to bridge the gap and create equilibrium between social classes.

We may ask ourselves now , Is Tawfiq al Hakīm's concept of equilibrium valid ? Viewed in the context of the Islamic mind , it is undoubtedly so, for Islam in its original form is essentially a doctrine of equilibrium. Muslims are commanded to give their attention to this world and the next , and are promised rewards in both. After the ideal of human love in the teaching of Christianity , Islam restored equilibrium by the doctrine that allowed war only as a defensive measure. The theory of equilibrium is also recognised by the human race as a whole , in expressions like "moderation in all things" , or the "happy medium" or the "golden mean". Like many great thinkers before him, Tawfiq al Hakīm reminds us of something which already lies within us , as the answer to many human difficulties.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## Three Typical Instances of Equilibrium.

Tawfiq al Hakim's concept of equilibrium , which has been already discussed in detail , affects not only his choice of theme and dramatic figures , but also his approach to the chosen subject , influencing his handling of plot and character more or less perceptibly in the direction of his philosophical orientation.

This manner of treatment is distinctly observable in the following three plays which though published and performed at different times form an entity as seen from the viewpoint of literary criticism.

The first two plays , Isis and As Sultān ul Hāir , are political , but are not similar to the bulk of dramatic political production of that time in that they are not realistic but figurative, and the solution arrived at has not merely an individual and temporary, but a general and eternal validity. The third , Ya\_tālī' Esh\_shagarah, which represents the advent of non-realism in contemporary Egyptian drama , is a very successful attempt to inject new blood into theatre.

In " Isis " the contrast is between idealism and not so much realism as expediency in political manoeuvring. Al Hakim believes in the freedom of choice, and the decision lies with the masses , the people , an



idea which is , in its essence , democratic. It is by democratic means that the balance between excesses of realism and idealism must be established if the solution is to be viable.

### . i + Isis.

The play "Isis" makes its most obvious impact on questions of political morality , but within Tawfiq al Ḥakīm's concept of " equilibrium " . Osiris , the scientist and philanthropist , devotes his energies to inventions that will help humanity. The political tasks, which his position as king imposes on him , he is prepared to leave to his brother Tayfūn. The latter takes advantage of this by collecting around him a band of conspirators , usurping Osiris's power, and killing him. (1)

With the force of evil in political control of the country , the side of right is faced with a moral decline : Whether to use completely irreproachable methods in overthrowing Tayfūn , or to fight evil with its own methods , basically , whether the end justifies the means. Thūth , the artist , at first does not wish to become embroiled in this question , but eventually has to make a decision , and becomes entirely involved. By this , Tawfiq al Ḥakīm illustrates one of his most important doctrines , namely that the artist cannot help taking a stand on the major issues facing his community ,



and playing a major part in settling them. Thūth reveals his earlier feelings in a dialogue with Mastas<sup>t</sup>, another artist, and declares that he does not wish to help the peasant women who want him to find a solution to their problems and stand with them against " Shaikh al Balad "<sup>-2-</sup>.

Mastat : Are you pleased with what Shaikh al Balad is doing, Thūth ?

Thuth : That is none of our business. Let us join our friends and amuse the people in the market with our pipes.

Mastat : The people in the market do not need our flutes. They need our help.

Thuth : I am not a magician, I am an artist. My art is magic, but they do not want to understand that. To them every one who uses a pen is a magician.

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- = (1) The myth says that Tayfun accomplished his crime in the following manner : he had a box made into which Osiris's body fitted exactly. By promising to give the box to the man who fitted exactly inside it, he lured Osiris into it, shut the lid and threw the box into the Nile. But his wife, Isis, could bring him back to life by means of her magic power. In Tawfiq al Hakin's play, Osiris was rescued by sailors and sold as slave to a foreign king, but Isis found him after a long search, and brought him back to Egypt. There he was finally found, killed and dismembered by Tayfūn's men.
- (2) The position of Shaikh al Balad is similar to that of of the Prime Minister in a modern state.

Mastat : They are right.

Thuth : What do you say ?

Mastat : Every one who uses a pen is a magician. Why  
should this not be <sup>-1-</sup>so ?

By this subsidiary theme , Tawfīq al Hakīm shows that the artist is a miracle worker , and that the power of the pen is magical in quality. The playwright emphasises this idea by another subtle insinuation when Isis , who said " I am all that was , is , and will be , and no mortal has yet drawn back my veil " , removes her veil before Thūth, the artist , thus demonstrating that only the artist is able to grasp the meaning of mythology and the mysteries of life.

It is interesting to mention that the playwright , who stripped " Oedipus " of its mythical elements, also wishes to remove Isis from the world of mythology. In ancient Egyptian mythology , Isis appears as a capable goddess who uses her magical and supernatural powers to bring Osiris back to life , but she appears in the play as a human being who fears , loves , feels pain and relies on conventional human methods to defend herself and her son and avenge her husband's death. She is really no different from the peasant women as she herself says. In a discussion with Thūth , she tells him that , like any mortal in trouble , she will accept help from any

quarter : " Is there any difference between me and other women ? When we women lose thing dear to us we seek for the miracle wherever it can be found <sup>-1-</sup> ". But miracles do not come from outside. The miracle which Isis is seeking for " is already in her heart <sup>-2-</sup> " as a human , not supernatural , being.

Now , Thūth is entirely involved in the problem. But here a crisis of conscience ensues. Isis is prepared to use Tayfun's own methods against him ; her loyalty is only to the cause in which she believes, but Mastas insists that their methods must be ethical ; thus his loyalty is essentially to moral principles. In other words , Thūth has to chose between realism , represented by Isis , and idealism , represented by Mastas. Thus no sooner has he made the choice of participation , than he is faced with another choice. His support of Isis's view is a victory for realism.

There is an autobiographical admission discernable here , for Tawfiq al Hakīm , whose works in the early nineteen thirties indicate that he hesitated between the two tendencies conflicting at the time , Art for art's sake and Art for life, found himself compelled to participate in the problems of his society. His later embracing of realism enabled him to analyse the human situation more deeply.



The play also symbolises a number of questions that are of concern to contemporary Egyptian society. For many years , reformers in Egypt set about their task by peaceful means , without open antagonism to established authority , but finally the problems could only be resolved by a revolution which was designed and carried on by a certain sector of the people. The message of the play is that the people alone can decide in issues of great importance , and they must have the last word. This is introduced by Shaikh al Balad , originally Tayfūn's trusted man , whom the idealist Mastas does not trust and refuses to work with. When Tayfūn is about to execute the son of Osiris , Shaikh al Balad intervenes and asks for a public trial , so that the people may decide. The people's conduct, during the trial , shows that they are worthy of trust , and capable of shouldering the whole responsibility.

The confrontation between good , represented by Isis and her son , and evil , represented by Tayfun -- later known as Set, the god of darkness - is evidence that good cannot triumph except with a realistic approach. At the trial , the people insist on the most exhaustive evidence , show themselves unwilling to be deceived , and act generally in a fully responsible manner. The final outcome is that the people award the

throne to Osiris's son , while Tayfun flees the country unpunished thus demonstrating that although evil may be defeated , it does not cease to be with us.

It is interesting to note that the central content of the Osiris myth is a very familiar story that has fascinated the human mind since the dawn of history. The force of evil rebels against the supreme God , and gains a powerful hold over the human race. The power of this satanic force is defeated or banished by the "Son of God" who comes to earth in order to re-establish the Kingdom of Heaven. Whether one agrees with the historical accuracy or theological conclusion of this concept , one certainly cannot deny its metaphorical validity ; for in one form or another , this concept has laid its hold on the minds of men in civilizations as widely different as those of ancient pagan Egypt and the medieval Christian World. It seems , however , that the author is more concerned with the human elements which the myth implies than with the myth itself. One must admit that such an approach is not the best when dealing with mythological themes such as Oedipus or Isis. Perhaps this is why the author makes it clear that his " intention is not to portray life under the Pharaohs , or to describe ancient Egyptian beliefs" , and that he concerns himself with an attempt " to

present the characters of mythology in a new ,human  
light , and to extract its meaning in a context  
understood in all ages , and in the present age in  
-1-  
particular.



ii - Al Sultan al Hair.

( The Sultan who was at his wits end ).

This play is an excellent example of the correlation between Tawfiq al Hakim's work and the problems of Egyptian society. ~~at the time.~~ When this play appeared , Egypt had reached a point of decision in her post-revolutionary development. Was the country to remain under a semi-military government , with dictatorial emergency powers , so that what had been gained by the revolution should be protected and kept under control by the leader ? Or ~~would~~ should the path of constitutional rule be followed , even though previous experiments on these lines had been exploited by opportunists and had led to domination by selfish politicians ? Enemies of the revolution were still numerous , and such a path was an obvious risk , which might entail the loss of all which the revolution had achieved as well as failure to implement future reforms.

Tawfiq al Hakim gives an unequivocal answer to this question. By following the rule of law , the Sultan risks losing not only his throne but also his liberty for he accepts a return to slave status. Yet his decision is unquestionably correct , and the moral victory which he gains thereby is far greater than any greatness which he would have possessed had he chosen to remain on his

throne by force.

Likewise , Al Hakim points out the limitations of the mere letter of the law , and demonstrates that it is vitally important to have a profound feeling for the spirit of it also. A literalist attitude to constitutional government might lead Egypt back into the chaos of false democracy in which she had floundered under the monarchy. To avoid this , the people must be aware of the spirit of democracy : the principle that overnment must be vested in the people for their interests. Concern for the law must never be allowed to take precedence over the cause of justice which it is designed to save. In this light , the Sultan rebukes the judge , the representatives of the law , for his treachery in bringing him out of the woman's house by having the *adhān* called prematurely :

" Yet it was you yourself who first showed me the nobility of the law , and how it should be respected, and told me that it was the master to be obeyed , and that I should bow to it ... so I bowed to it with all my humility to the end. But did it ever occur to me that I would eventually see you regarding the law in this way, stripping it of its holy mantle until it became for you no more than a mockery, (empty) sentences , mere words and playthings?"

The scene of "Al Sultan al Hair" is Egypt at the time of the Mamlūk Sultāns. In spite of the historical

background it is not a historical play , for the problem it deal with are timeless. The fearless Mamlūks were without exception freed slaves ,brought up to rule the country and especially trained for responsibility. One of these is the central figure of this play.

In the first scene , which takes place in a prison cell , the conversation between the prisoner and hangman reveals that the former is to be executed immediately after the "muazzin" has called for prayers at dawn. The prisoner , who has sent a petition to the Sultan , is extremely worried about the time and wants to make sure whether or not the hangman is seriously speaking about dawn as the time fixed for him to be executed. The hangman warns him that unless he sleeps well his hand will not be steady enough , and suggests that both of them have a drink at the prisoners expense. The hangman, drunk , makes a good deal of noise which provokes the protest of a woman neighbour , who is commonly regarded as a prostitute. Soon after dawn , the prime minister, whom the Sultan has sent to inquire into the matter , arrives fervently hoping that he will be too late to stay the execution. However , he finds the prisoner still alive , for the so-called prostitute, wanting to help the prisoner , has managed to induce the "muazzin" to accept her invitation for a refreshment in order to



prevent him from calling to prayers. Meanwhile the Sultan also arrives in the company of the supreme judge. It soon becomes evident that the prisoner is guilty of having called the Sultan a slave whom he himself had sold to the old sultan, his predecessor. So far the Sultan does not consider it a crime, since it is the exact truth. What complicates matters, however, is that the old Sultan, who treated his successor like a son, has neglected to set him free, so that, not being a free man, he is legally not a Sultan at all, and cannot continue to rule the country. At that stage of the play, the plot reaches its climax; the supreme judge tells both the Sultan and his prime minister that the Sultan has but to apply the law, and refuses all compromises suggested by them. The Sultan has it in his power to silence the rumours by cutting off the heads of the prisoner and of the supreme judge, and to remain on the throne, but he prefers the law to take its course.

Tawfiq al Hakīm, who is also a man-of-law, creates a sharp confrontation between law and force: as a result of the Sultan's slave status, his succession to the sultanate is invalid, and all the former Sultan's property - including the young Sultan himself who is now regarded as a slave - must fall to the treasury.

Moreover, he must be put up for sale by public auction. By this sharp confrontation, the play places more emphasis upon the idea which is represented in many of Al Hakīm's plays, including his intellectual plays, namely that the greatest victory of Man lies in his domination over his human feelings. The will of Man, though though it is conditioned by a Greater Will, is the only faculty which enables him to live correctly, and to develop and realise the finer purpose of his existence. The conflict in the play is not between Man and another unknown force, as in Al Hakīm's Oedipus or between will and sentiment, as in his 'Anan; it is between the higher-self and the lower-self, or rather between two powers, both of which are man-made; the rule of law which is the product of man's wisdom and force of arms which is the product of **his** lower-self. Both of these can lead to either good or evil, depending on human will, whose duty it is to create an equilibrium between them, although the man who substitutes the rule of law for the sword is not cowardly but rather gifted with an unusual courage and self-discipline; his crucial moment is that of choice. The following dialogue illustrates the difficulty in which the Sultan finds

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(1) This emphasises the idea implied in the Prophet's saying; The "jihad" against oneself is the greatest jihad.

himself before he takes his final decision :

Judge. : I am not tying your hands, Sire. You have full freedom to apply your rule as you wish.

Sultan. : All right. Now I see what I have to do.

Minister. : What are you going to do, Sire ?.

Sultan. : Look at this old man (pointing to the judge). Do you see him carrying a sword in his belt ? Certainly not. He carries only a tongue in his mouth ... But I carry this (indicates his sword), and it is not a wooden sword or plaything. It is a real sword, it has to be put to use, and there should be a reason for its existence. Do you understand what I mean? Answer. Why was it decreed that I should carry this ? For ornament or for action?

.....

Sultan. : And you, judge, why don't you answer...

Judge. : For one of them.

Sultan. : What do you say ?

Judge. : I say one or the other.

Sultan. : What do you mean ?

Judge. : I mean that you have the choice, Sire. You can use it for action, or you can use it



for ornament. I recognise what certain power and quick stroke and decisive result the sword has. But the sword gives the right to the strongest, and who knows who will be the strongest tomorrow .... But law protects your rights from all aggressions; for it does not recognise the strongest. It recognises the one in the right. And now, Sire, what you have is simply a choice: between the sword, which can impose you, but also exposes you, and the law, which challenges you, but protects you.

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Sultan. : ( to the minister) What a cursed old man!  
He has a rare genius for plunging us  
always into hesitation.

Judge. : What I have done, Sire, is to show the  
two sides of the problem. But the choice  
is yours.

Sultan. : The choice ! The choice! ... .. This  
is the moment I dread. The dreaded moment  
for every ruler... The moment he  
makes the final decision; the decision  
that will change the course of events...

the moment in which he utters that little word that determines an irrevocable  
 -1-  
 choice; a choice which decides the future.

The Sultan, who has fought many **battles** decisive in the history of his country and gained more than one victory over the Mongol hordes with his sword, decides to replace the sword with the rule of the law. This, however, proves that "to follow this path to its end requires greater courage than that of the sword: the young ruler is put up for sale by public auction and acquired for thirty thousand dinars by the supposed prostitute. This lady who, as is presently found out, is a respectable young widow whom her husband permitted to enjoy the pleasure of intellectual discussions in masculine company, refuses to abide by the previously made agreement to give the Sultan his freedom on the spot, and to enable him to **resume** his position. She requires him first to take up domicile in her house as her slave and the Sultan, anxious that right should be done and more interested to see the end of the game, is also ready, or rather insists on submitting to that. Although the lady has made it clear that she will give the Sultan his freedom at dawn - at the moment when the people hear the muazzin calling for prayers - the

masses seem to be dissatisfied. They do not like their Sultan to spend the night in the house of that "immoral woman". The supreme judge, who did not think of all these sad consequences, becomes fully aware of the delicate situation of the Sultan, and decides to act at once. This time, his action has to be a violation of the spirit of the law: he orders the muazzin to call for prayers prematurely, at midnight, which leads the masses to rise against the muazzin. The Sultan who strongly insists on following the spirit of the law, refuses to agree with the supreme judge in his attempt to twist the words of the agreement, and decides to go back to the house of the widow, but she refuses and foregoes her right. The Sultan rewards her, publicly acknowledging her virtue and kindness, and presenting her with the central jewel from his turban ; the jewel which he had acquired by defeating the Mongol army, and which was considered the symbol of his glory.

The play, as the playwright says, is inspired by what is happening in the world today, and "its inspiration is the question before which our world stands hesitating : Should the world's problems be solved by the sword or the rule of law? .... Which requires more courage to apply, the sword or the law?.... ".



In the play, the conflict is on the face of it, between the sword and the law, but closer scrutiny reveals that the equilibrium is to be established between the spirit of the law and its application and execution. There are thus two kinds of courage: the one needed to fight, to deal a blow in the literal sense of the phrase, and the other to act in accordance with one's conviction but against one's desires, (moral courage) to do one's duty against one's inclination, to obey the voice of conscience. The author is not quite able to reconcile the two tendencies, and so the golden mean between inclination and duty is not found; he comes down too heavily on the side of duty for the principle of equilibrium to be successfully established. The judge, who personifies the arm of the law, is strongly caricatured; in normal civilised states, justice does not proceed in such a radical way; one would hardly sell the sovereign in order to satisfy the requirements of absurd regulations. Thus in exposing the law to ridicule, the author implies that it would be possible and indeed feasible, to achieve the equilibrium under  
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 ordinary circumstances.

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- (1) Tawfiq al Hakīm, who held for a time the office of public prosecutor and to whom the crisis of conscience to which the representative of the judiciary system is often subject was not unknown, must have experienced many a time the urge to find a moderate, well-balanced judgement.

Also the duality implied in the concept of equilibrium is clearly observable in the play of words resulting from the double meaning of the word "sultān" which signifies not only "the ruler" but also "the power" and is obvious that there can be no balance unless the weight of authority and that of power are found in exact correspondence in the opposite scale of the balance. To judge by a statement of the author himself made in the introduction to his play, he wanted to point to the conflict between the law and power as it appears in international politics, though the latter do not figure in the play itself in any way.

However, the playwright's choice of this Arab historical frame-work - for the story is of an historical incident - supports the concept that Tawfīq al Ḥakīm, the innovator and revolutionary writer, is always concerned about the continuity of the finest traditions of oriental society. Besides, the play has its strong reflection on the life of contemporary Egypt as well as other Arab countries. Tawfīq al Ḥakīm is really no common playwright. In works such as this, he becomes the philosopher, at times even the conscience, of Egyptian society. Here he indicates the correct path which his society should follow, warning of the pitfalls, and demonstrating that path's moral superiority.

iii- Yā Tali' esh-Shagara:

The play Yā Tali' esh-Shagara (Thou Who Art Climbing the Tree) is a non-realistic play, which emphasises the necessity of a state of equilibrium between the real and imaginary world, between realism and surrealism. The two worlds, the realistic and the surrealist one, exist in the play not only side by side, but overlap in places, so that the characters have a realistic and non-realistic side at the same time, as if possessed of supernatural power. Here the contrast, as appears on the surface, is between the conscious and the sub-conscious, but the play is a subtle combination of allegory, folklore and literature.

In this play, the author introduces the audience to a couple who live on two planes, that of real life, and that of personal dreams. While they are able to cross or remove the barrier dividing the two worlds, and resist Man's innate urge to explore the boundaries of the unknown, the couple are happy, but as soon as they succumbed to the temptation of forbidden fruit, unable to resist the lure of the mystery any longer, they lose their "paradise". It is Bahādir's insistence on a definite answer to his question, in his own words,

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(1) Published in 1962 by Maktabit al-Adab, Cairo.



on "a realistic and reasonable answer" that leads him to his doom.

Bahadir, a retired railway-inspector, has married a widow who is unable to bear him a child. She ascribes her childlessness to an abortion she underwent thirty or forty years <sup>her</sup> before because she and first husband were desperately poor and could not afford a family. The tragedy itself and her subsequent barrenness have affected her sanity and though, many years have passed since her pregnancy, she continues sewing baby clothes. One day the wife disappears, and does not return. A police inspector calls to investigate the mysterious disappearance of the wife. When the maid-servant is questioned, she states that her mistress went out three days before to buy a reel of cotton to sew the baby's dress and has not been seen since. She asserts that the relationship between the couple has always been very happy, and that they never quarrel, a statement which the police inspector doubts, but the maid-servant points to a corner of the stage where, at that moment, the semblances of the wife and husband appear, and she adds: "You can see yourself". The conversation between the wife and husband shows that they are seemingly at cross purposes but understand each other in an obscure and subconscious way. In the dialogue that

ensues, the wife speaks to her husband of her baby e while the husband speaks of his orange tree and of Al Shaikha Kadrāh, the lizard which lives under the tree. That is why they are happy and never quarrel.

Wife. : Come inside, Bahādir, The air is damp outside.

Husb. :(comes in with his gardening tools) I know that it has been damp outside. Once it is damp, Sheikha Khadrāh returns home. What I don't know is why the orange tree loses some of its fruit.

Wife. : "She" was my first fruit, and I myself procured the abortion. He didn't want her at that time because we were poor. He said:"Don't complicate my life by adding to its burdens.

Husb. : Yes. This <sup>is</sup> certainly <sup>what</sup> complicates my life; there is no wind and yet ...

Wife. : And yet I listened to him and did it. I did it myself. The wind of fortune changed and we built this house and this garden.

Husb. : This garden is not exposed to strong winds, and yet I was worried when the orange tree was in blossom, but God pro-  
tected us till we escaped/<sup>the</sup>danger.

Wife. : Yes, God protected us when times <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~ hard  
and we were struggling. Later the time came  
when we wanted to have children, but we  
failed. The first miscarriage had, undoubted-  
-ly, affected me. Yes it was the first mis-  
carriage.

Husb. : It must have been, but it doesn't matter.  
They are only a few unripe oranges, as  
small as hazelnuts.

Wife. : She was as big as the palm of my hand, The  
miscarriage occurred in the fourth month,  
and she was already moving in my body.

Husb. Yes, I have seen the branches moving slowly.

Wife. : She was moving, and I could understand that  
she was a girl ... Besides, I wanted to  
have a girl.

Husb. : I also wanted them to move slowly or not to  
move at all. There will be no damage if the  
branches do not move in the first days of  
fruit bearing.

Wife. : And I knew that she would be healthy and  
beautiful.

.....  
.....

Husb. : Yes, Yes.



-1-

Wife. : Yes. Yes.

The imaginary couple disappear, and in the ensuing realistic atmosphere, the police inspector, a down-to-earth type, questions the maid servant suspecting the husband of having caused his wife's disappearance. The scene is illustrative of the dual character of the play: the wife, presumed missing, is present all the time, in her imaginary form, in another corner of the stage. The inspector who listens to the conversation of the couple, seems to be convinced that they are a figment of his imagination, and continues his enquiry. When in an attempt to wheedle out the truth from the husband, the police inspector asks him whether he knows where the body of his wife is, and the husband answers, absent-mindedly, that the best place to bury her is under the tree: "There, she will ripen to flowers and mature fruit. She will become the manure that nourishes the tree and helps it to produce growing oranges. This will, undoubtedly please her, as she<sup>has</sup>/always been interested in the Great Growth". This confirms the suspicion of the police inspector, who is under the impression that one cannot be happy with such an "intolerable woman". The scene develops into a tug of war in which the husband tries to prevent the inspector from digging under the

(1) pp.46 ; 52 ( See original on page 335 ).

tree in search of the body. The discussion between the two reflects the author's opinion which is typical of his insistence on the necessity of equilibrium, that all views may be equally correct.

One is to be reminded that the leit - motif of the play is the common human urge to ask questions, expecting an answer to every question until finally one question, which is probably the most important of them all, remains without answer. In the conversation between the police inspector and Bahadir, the former, a true criminal investigator, is firmly convinced, in line with his professional outlook, that there is nothing one cannot find out by examination and cross-examination, and ignores what Tawfiq al Hakim implies, that there are some answers which will be arrived at by intuition rather than logical reasoning. Here the inspector himself must admit this fact: on the first occasion, his questions and his suspect's answers seem proof to him that his quarry is guilty, but the same questions and the same answers under different circumstances convince him that the man is innocent.

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- (1) The same process is observable in the dialogue between the dervish and the police inspector in Part Two. Also the dervish about whose transcendental nature there is no doubt, always says: "Don't ask me questions".

The two planes overlap again. Now there are, simultaneously, two Bahadirs on the stage: the one is conducting the conversation with the police inspector, while the other is on the train carrying on his job as a railway-inspector. The darvish is brought in for travelling without a ticket, but he shows his birth-certificate which, he believes, entitles him to take "the original train", <sup>and</sup> /when ~~the~~ railway-inspector insists on taking action against him, he puts his hand out of the train window and produces out of the air ten real tickets: "Nothing is easier to get than your train tickets ".

The scene develops quickly until Bahadir is seen talking to the darvish about a "dreadful unknown person" who follows him about and frightens him, and asking for the darvish's help to protect him from that person. The police-inspector asks the real Bahadir to tell him who the person is, but the latter tells him that he does not understand what the dream Bahadir, on the train, is talking about and suggests that he ask the darvish whose transcendental power becomes unquestionable. At this moment, the darvish leaves the train and joins them and when he sees Bahadir and the police-inspector, he addresses the former: "Then you have done it". He, however, refuses to give a definite answer: "Either he



has killed her or will do so in the future".(p.101).

Because of the darvish's vague utterance, Bahādir is arrested and imprisoned as a murder suspect, but the wife appears and he is released. The prison seems, however, to have changed him a great deal; he has been taken out of his world of dreams, because he is no longer able to accept its visions, and dragged into the world of reality: "While in my cell, I felt like a baby who is still in his mother's womb, and is waiting for a hand to help him out of it". (p.156).

The last scene of the play marks Bahādir's real tragedy. He wants and insists on knowing where his wife was during her three days of disappearance, but she refuses to give him a definite answer, and finally takes refuge in silence; the "dreadful and killing silence, as he describes it, which leads him to kill her in a fit of anger.

The play comes to an end with the darvish entering when Bahādir is trying to find a place to bury his wife. He tells the husband to bury her under the orange tree. This tree Bahādir believes, will turn into a miraculous one, bearing four different fruits, when it thrives on a human body which is made up of paradoxes. In the ensuing dialogue, which summarises the issues at stake Bahādir declares that he is determined to get the

-1-

tree whatever sacrifices he has to make.

Bahādir. : Come and help me.

Darvish. : To do what ?

Bahādir. : To bury her. The grave is ready.

Darvish. : God forbid.

Bahādir. Do you refuse ?

Darvish. : Yes I do.

Bahādir. : But you know that I was going to kill  
her.

Darvish. : To know doesn't mean that one approves.

Bahādir. : In that case, I am a criminal in your  
opinion.

Darvish. : Is there any doubt about it ?

Bahādir. : Be a bit fair to me, I beg you ... Do  
you think it possible to live with such  
a woman ?

Darvish. : You lived with her for many years before.

Bahādir. : But she turned out to be something dread-  
ful; a silent wall.

Darvish. : It is a sufficient reason for destruction,  
one must agree.

Bahādir. : Don't mock at me. If you were in my  
position you would do the same.

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(1) The tree seems to be symbolic of the eternal life,  
or art or knowledge of the unknown.

Darvish. : I shall never be in your position.

Bahādir. : I couldn't prevent myself. This is out  
of my power.

Darvish. : I know.

Bahādir. : Was it possible for me to remain in  
ignorance.

Darvish. : No. Not you.

Bahādir. : Then ?

Darvish. : Go and bury her.

Bahādir. : You are going to help me, aren't you ?

Darvish. : Don't expect any help. Carry her yourself.

Bahādir. : All right .... I'll carry her myself, and  
I'll bury her: under the tree. I feel no  
sorrow. Her life was fruitless.

Darvish. : It isn't so, since you are going to offer  
her as food : for your tree.

.....  
.....

Bahādir. : Will the tree really give all those  
different fruits during the four seasons?

Darvish. : Don't ask me.

.....  
.....

Bahādir. : (People) will say that that miraculous  
tree is one of the most important dis-  
coveries of modern times.



- Darvish. : No doubt scientists will investigate its mystery.
- Bahādir. : Investigate ? In that case, scientists will come to this garden.
- Darvish. : Naturally, and they will examine every foot of it ...
- Bahādir. : In that case, they will dig under the tree.
- Darvish. : Very deep.
- Bahādir. : But they will find the body.
- Darvish. : Or its skeleton.
- Bahādir. : And there will be questions and answers.
- Darvish. : Certainly.
- Bahādir. : And the police will interfere.
- Darvish. : No doubt about it.
- Bahādir. : What about the miraculous tree and the strange discovery, and the profit which science and people will gain out of this.
- Darvish. : Science and people will gain all the profit.
- Bahādir. : You will profit by Bahadir's tree.
- Darvish. : Yes, they will profit by Bahadir's tree, but Bahadir himself will go to prison.
- Bahādir. : The miraculous discovery means that my crime is to be discovered.

- Darvish. : Exactly.
- Bahādir. : And I have to pay for it.
- Darvish. : Exactly.
- Bahādir. : ( thinking ) Therefore, I must decide.
- Darvish. : But one condition is that your decision must be carefully made.
- Bahādir. : No need for any kind of carefulness. My decision is made. It is final, and nothing will frighten me or make me refrain **even** if I were to be put to death. My life will be of no value for me.
- Darvish. : What is your decision ?
- Bahādir. : I want the miraculous tree.
- Darvish. : Go <sup>†</sup> Go then and bring it its food
- Bahādir. : I am <sup>(1)</sup> going

But the body of the wife disappears and is not to be found anywhere in the house. Bahādi hurries to the garden, but instead his wife or her body he finds the lizard, dead and lying in the grave under the orange tree.

As the author himself says in the introduction:  
"Like an orange which is cut into two halves, the play consists of two parts, a realistic and a surrealist", but we cannot say that one is <sup>the</sup> realistic one with its

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(1) See original p. 336.

logical premises and consistent sequences of facts, and the other the non-realistic one with its exaggerated and imaginary events.

Consequently, the characters, as well as the events, represent a strange mixture of realistic and non-realistic. There is the railway-inspector who spends his days looking after his single orange tree and a lizard, which lives in a hole under the tree. The wife who is always engrossed in preparing dresses for a baby-girl she miscarried thirty years before. The dervish who appears on the stage whenever he feels that he is wanted. There are only two completely realistic figures, a maid-servant and a police-inspector. By this approach, the author emphasises his conception of equilibrium. The playwright does not rely on characters to make his figurative, or rather symbolic, expression, but also uses objects, such as the train which appears on the stage as a symbol of earthly life. The theme itself, which the playwright claims he has borrowed from Egyptian folklore, is in complete harmony with his conception of equilibrium; here between the world of reality and the world of dreams.

#### Symbolic Aspects of Yā Tali' es Shagara:

Tawfiq al Hakīm, who proved very successful, in Al-Sultan Al-Hair, 'in applying"figurative expression",



seems to have defeated his end by this symbolic play, Yatali' esh Shagarah.

The play is an allegory. The wife's miscarriage thirty years previously represents an attempt by the subconscious to bring something forth for the conscious, and the failure of this attempt. But the wife still makes clothes for this baby, and talks about her continuously; thus the subconscious still hopes of bringing forth its content. The atmosphere of this is heightened by the typical folksong of the "Subu" or festival for a new-born child, which accompanies the play throughout, punctuated on occasion by the train's whistle. This embodies Tawfiq al Hakim's optimism that the spiritual conflict in man will eventually be<sup>re</sup>/solved. The theme is also indicative of the theory of the unreality of time, for there is no barrier, in the play, between past, present and future.

The wife and husband live together on the borderland of the realism of the conscious and the sur-realism of the subconscious. But the husband undergoes a change and wants a "reasonable and logical answer" as to where his wife has been, the conscious seeks to assert itself in the "material" and "practical". The wife refuses to give this, for fear that it will destroy

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(1) The thirty years may also be symbolic of Egypt's thirty barren years between 1919 and the 1952 Revolution.

their happiness; the subconscious can accept repression by the conscious or erecting of barriers between them that only a logical and practical answer would involve. The death of the wife indicates that the conscious has finally killed the subconscious; thus the human being's hope of inward harmony is, though only apparently, ended.

It is significant to note that the play is based on archetypal symbols. The tree may represent the plant of immortality, while the lizard or "salamander" that lives in or under the shade of the tree is the spiritus mercurii (spirit of mercury), the substance that turns base metal to gold; in fact the purifying fire that can transmute the human soul. When the darvish told Bahad~~ir~~ that he would get the tree and the lizard, he implied that he would gain the means of perfection. The lizard in alchemy is half woman, and is married to the philosopher's son, or the seeker - one must be reminded that Bahad~~ir~~ symbolises the artist. The four fruits symbolise completion, for the number four, embodying the square,

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(1) v. Jung: Psychology and Alchemy; vol. 12;  
p. 437.

the elements, the seasons and points of compass, is the number of completion.

Expressed in terms of psychology, the four main figures, the darvish, the husband, the wife and the lizard, represent the four component parts in the human psyche. The dervish is the higher self, the Adam Kadman or spiritual life in man. The husband is the everyday self, or the conscious which is concerned with maintaining the practical outward impression. The wife is the subconscious, and the lizard is the collective unconscious, the storer of the archetypes of the human race, which intrudes on earthly life.

The higher self attaches supreme importance to the arche-typal memory in man's psyche, for it is only through the development and bringing to consciousness of this memory that man can discover the ancient wisdom concerning the purpose of life and the means of fulfilling that purpose. Therefore the darvish mourns at the death of the lizard.

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- (1) The character of the darvish in this play is far more exclusively symbolic than in other Egyptian plays. It can be said that Bahadir, presumably a self-portrait of the artist, acquires symbolic significance only occasionally, at times of special mental stress, while the darvish, a figure customarily used in a symbolic sense it symbolises supernatural power, towards which man leans and whose protection he seeks. He is of the type called "magzub" which symbolises escapism.
  - (2) In his "Isis", the playwright is quite certain that the artist is entitled to discover the purpose and secret of life. v.p. 98.



The failure of man to resolve his conflict symbolised by this play is tempered with a message of hope and advice. Although the other hope of reaching into the collective unconscious of the archetypes ends as a natural consequence with the death of the lizard, Bahadir is told, by the darwish, to bury his wife at the foot of the tree, so that the tree may bear the four fruits; thus the eternal life implicit in the plant, and the wholeness of personality in the fruits can only be obtained after the subconscious has been accepted. But the lizard's body appears at the foot of the tree to demonstrate that the answer lies in the collective unconscious.

The tree can only obtain nourishment from the human body which is full of paradoxes. The value of paradox as a form of spiritual truth has been recognized, both in alchemy and in Jung's psychology.

## CHAPTER SIX

## I-The change in Social Values.

As Reflected in the Drama of Tawfiq al Hakim.

Some of Tawfiq al Hakim's plays are intimately related to the thorough change of moral standards which took place between the two world wars. As a result of the cataclysmic experience of the First World War and repeated social upheavals, the moral attitude deteriorated in many aspects. To mention but one, the attention of a large sector of Egyptian society was directed towards personal promotion. Public employment and lucrative positions in private enterprise became the subject of fierce competition. The wish to get rich at any price became all powerful and occupied the minds of the people to the exclusion of anything else. The modern ways of life created new types of people : businessmen, war-profiteers, professional politicians and opportunists. The Egyptian women who in <sup>the</sup> 1920's, had comparatively modest ambitions, began to insist on equality with men. They were no longer ready to accept without resistance their supremacy, and wanted to be not only nurses, teachers, doctors, lawyers and scholars, but also politicians and cabinet ministers and to occupy executive positions in all kinds of organisations.

These changes in social behaviour are fully reflected in Al Hakin's "Masrah al Mugtama' ", The  
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 Theatre Society. Although a study such as this requires a detailed analysis of other works by the play-wright, Masrah al Mugtama' has been chosen because it contains those of Al Hakin's plays in which he has taken up a new standpoint and adapted a new technique in handling the main problems of society. However he is more concerned with passive tendencies, and concen-  
 -2-  
 trates on social defects. He has no sympathy whatsoever with the capitalist classes nor does he approve of snobs and social climbers. He also considers that the emancipation of women has gone too far, and fears that this may affect the equilibrium of society. Modern life he regards as a threat to the traditions of Egyptian family life. He is against the rapid change in the national customs.

The collection comprises, in 788 pages, 21 plays of various length which can be divided into three groups: Social-purpose plays, whose significance is derived from the social facts they portray, which indicate that he has made a thorough study of his society and

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- (1) The title of a collection of 21 plays which is believed to be written during and after the Second World War. V. Masrah al Mugtama's Vol.1; Maktabat al Adab (s.d.); p 7



understood it very deeply. Tawfiq al Ḥakīm's ideology, especially his attempt to discredit Egyptian capitalism long before the 1952 Revolution, had actively influenced the new constitution and , as a result, the social conditions of the country. After the 1919 Revolution and in the 1940's, when <sup>these</sup> plays were written, Egyptian society inclined towards immoral materialism, and this is the tendency mostly exposed in this group of plays.

The second group gives priority to psychological facts, but one does not feel that the plays are psychological studies. "Art as a means of knowledge differs from philosophy in that it uses science but does not become science"<sup>-1-</sup>. These psychological plays are primarily works of art, and as such intended less to teach than to entertain, though the message is never absent.

The plays of the third group are not numerous, but their value lies in the circumstance that the facts are given general significance. They combine realism with symbolism and the mixture is very effective indeed. The Egyptian literature, which was then hesitating between romanticism, realism and naturalism was threatened by either tortured romanticism or shallow naturalism.

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(1) cf. Henri Lefebvre; Contribution A L'Esthetique; p. 10

Tawfiq al Hakin's plays were a godsend, providing a very welcome guidance to the right path.

The first play in the collection "Bain Yawn wa Lailah", ( before overnight ), exposes the ugliness of opportunism. A rich young farmer who proposed to the daughter of a cabinet minister writes him a letter requesting him to fix the day of the engagement. However, the cabinet resigns and the young man, who sees no advantage in marrying his fiancée if her father loses his influential position, approaches the minister's secretary and succeeds in recovering his letter. Having opened it carefully, he substitutes for the original letter one retracting his proposal; he expects the date on the postage stamp to prove that he broke off the engagement before and not after the fall of the government, which will save his face. The unexpected happens and the minister occupies the same post in the new government. His prospective son-in-law now hurries to the minister's house to get hold of the letter before the latter can read it. He succeeds in persuading him to defer the reading of his mail and to put it in a locked drawer of which he secures the keys. However, the dog runs away with the keys and it is only after a strenuous pursuit of the animal that the opportunist can retrieve his letter and marry the girl who

has again gained value in his eyes.

Most of the characters of the play are unsympathetic :The young farmer who is its central figure, the secretary, the employees of the ministry. The only two humanly attractive characters, the minister and his daughter, represent no positive social values, and are rather shallow and gullible, an easy prey to flatterers.

Characteristic of a good number of these plays of Tawfiq al Hakim is his preoccupation with social problems which goes so far that he is sometimes totally oblivious of the fact that he is writing a play, and the dialogue sounds as if were an essay or a narration on one or the other aspect of the social conditions of the country.

The problems he has set out to combat in the following play, 'Al <sup>Liss</sup> ~~Liss~~, ( The thief ), are social injustice and moral corruption. The stranglehold of the capitalist class on the country which prevents the ablest among the impecunious classes from achieving a position of importance is aggravated by the low moral standards which the young people have inherited from the previous generation. Anybody who

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wants to get to the top comes up against this stone wall which it is almost impossible to overcome, and realizes that the only way to achieve his aim is to be as corrupt as the others.

Apart from these two main themes, the play contains marginal themes each of which would make an independent play in itself. Other writers have not been long in realizing that, and some of the motifs have become the subject of quite effective production. <sup>-1-</sup>

Al Lişş, Hamid, a gifted and educated young man, who has had to discontinue his academic studies after his father's death, is earning his livelihood as the manager of a small publishing firm whose owner is rich but ignorant. One day, Hamid is dismissed from his employment because he has paid a promising young author, for the right to publish his work, a sum of money which the owner considers excessive. Hamid who is conscious of his own value, recollects that his employer once told him that he had founded his business with the initial capital of a hundred pounds.

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- (1) Although originality in drama is not the subject of the present work, the fact cannot be overlooked that some of the typical characters and situations of Tawfiq al Hakim's plays have been recurring in the production of other, younger authors.

He feels that he must get hold of a similar sum by hook or by crook. Having decided to steal it, he breaks into the house of a rich pasha, and enters accidentally, the room of the pasha's step-daughter, where he hides behind the curtains. From this hide-out, he overhears a dramatic conversation between the young girl and her stepfather. It emerges that the girl, the daughter of a widow who has married this rich man, has recently come home to her mother from the boarding school at which she was brought up. Unfortunately, she has attracted the attention of her stepfather who wants to seduce her, threatening her that he will divorce her mother if she resists. The girl plays for time, and when the pasha leaves for a moment, prays aloud for an angel or a devil to save her from her plight. Hearing that, the young man comes out from his hiding place and, having briefly told her his story offers her his and his mother's hospitality. The girl is on the point of accepting when they are interrupted by the return of the pasha, who, having overheard the last part of the conversation, is convinced that the young man is the girl's lover and shoots him. When she knows that the pasha intends to hand the "intruder" over to the police, the girl who is determined to save the young man, persuades

her stepfather that she only wants to marry him in order to be able to conduct, undisturbed, an intrigue with her stepfather. The ruse works, and the young couple is comfortably provided for, the pasha having made Hamid the chairman of one of his companies. But it is a post in which he has the whip-hand over him and can easily dismiss him and put him in prison by accusing him of dishonesty. The play reaches its climax when the pasha sends the young husband to Alexandria and comes to his stepdaughter's flat to enforce his claim. Now the confrontation is between two sectors of the society: the most corrupt but well equipped sector, represented by the capitalist pasha, and the ambitious, though unearned young generation, represented by Hamid, and his young wife. When the pasha is forced to leave the flat, he is shot dead by a young man, whose sister the pasha has wronged and whom he has dismissed after having lost interest in the girl. By this, the playwright demonstrates that the young generation insists on having its share of comfortable and respectable life, and that it is ready to accept even a deadly challenge if necessary.

Tawfīq al Ḥakīm's main intention in writing this play was to expose the far-reaching moral corruption



of the capitalist classes which had the tendency to spread downward and communicate itself to the impecunious. He also emphasises that to resist the contagion requires stronger stamina than was possessed at the time by the lower strata of society. The play is, of course, a satire, reflecting Al Hakin's socialist ideology, especially the Marxist idea that economic conditions determine the spiritual and moral process of life. In its form, that is characterisation and plot, including the somewhat contrived situations designed to produce certain effects, it follows - in spite of its attitude which is of the utmost gravity - in the footsteps of the conventional French comedy as represented by Sardou, and makes, on the whole, a distinctly old fashioned impression.

One must be reminded that all the social-purpose plays in this collection seem to have been influenced by the powerful upsurge of indignation against the moral decline and corruption which was observable in the wake of the second World War and which did not subside until it found its expression in the 1952 Revolution. Tawfiq al Hakin was one of the pioneers of this reaction and really the hero of the movement, who was brave enough to voice his convictions in spite of the very real danger by which he was threatened.

iii - The play "A'nāl Hurrah" ( Free Enterprise ) is another attempt by Tawfīq al Ḥakīm to expose the corruption in the executive departments of the government. The scene of the play is the head office of the industrial works which not only thrives on governmental contracts, but shares all its employees with a ministerial department. They are all civil servants who, having spent their day at the desks of the ministry, ply another occupation at night to eke out their income, in a manoeuvre quite illegal in Egypt. When the curtain rises, the employees are notified by the caretaker that the Director General of their department has arrived. Convinced that he has come to track them down and expose them , they flee in a panic. It soon becomes apparent, however, that the director has an assignment with a young dancer on whom he has designs, and who is offered by the manager of the firm a financial reward if she helps to propitiate the Director General. Another lady visitor is announced and turns out to be the Director General's wife. Fearing the anger of this potentate, and intent on avoiding a scene, the manager tries to convince her that she is mistaken and has almost succeeded in doing so when, to his horror, the director with his sweetheart walks into the room. The ingenious manager

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(1) pp. 363 ; 385

finds an alternative explanation, which accidentally coincides with the truth: he tells the wife that he is trying to induce her husband to collaborate with his firm, and offers her a very handsome present if she agrees to support him in that. The irate wife whom everybody in the audience expects to vent her anger on her husband, quite surprisingly accepts the offer: "Don't worry. He will pay no attention but to his free enterprise". Tawfiq al Ḥakīm has succeeded in demonstrating the destructive power of money in a declining capitalist society.

iv - *Al Jiya'*, (The Hungry People) cannot be said to have a plot, or a denouement, because, although it begins as a farce, it has neither a climax nor a proper end. However, the characterisation, though sharply satirical, is superb, and the confrontation of two classes of society one of which is really physically hungry, while the other is only emotionally greedy, is very successful. Three dinner-tables are awaiting Shushu the wife of a rich aristocrat who has always led a sheltered life while others are nearly dying of starvation. The aristocratic lady has left a party she has attended with her husband to keep two secret assignments with two different men friends at different clubs, while the hungry little lottery-seller only



accidentally enjoys the food she has scorned.

v - "Al Ragul ul-Ladhī <sup>-1-</sup>Ṣanad", (The Man Who Stood Fast) exhibits, however, a strong belief in the future of society, but ends on a pessimistic note. The playwright believes that society is as yet unable to control the demoralizing tendencies of materialism, but is bound to prevail in the fight for a better future if a number of people adhere to inherited moral values. He wants to be realistic, and this wish makes the pessimistic ending unavoidable. Under prevalent conditions, a happy solution is impossible, but it can finally be found, and that is why his voice is so loud in calling for resistance.

There is a conflict between two contradictory attitudes, active resistance and conformity to the apparently dominant trend, neither of which prevails. Ṣālih Bey, a judge of the Court of Appeal, leaves his position to devote his time to politics. He becomes the chairman of the financial committee of the Senate, a position which is important, as any financial move of the Government ultimately depends on its assent. To obtain the favour, or silence, of so important a figure, big capitalist enterprises which were represented in the government of the time usually conferred privileges upon him, such as the chairmanship of industrial company.

Ṣālih Bey, however, is an idealist. In his youth, he belonged to a group of militant people, among whom was 'Abdel Barr Pasha who now joined the other side. When the play begins, Ṣālih Bey is in financial difficulties and about to mortgage his salary in order to find the money for his daughter's dowry. He is busy reading reports when he is interrupted by a visit - the first since they were youngmen - of 'Abdel Barr Pasha who, though his junior, has made a spectacular career in commerce, and who offers to pay him the large sum of £10,000 if he helps him to obtain an export license for goods which do not usually receive export permits. Salih Bey, "the man who stood fast" is facing a new test.

'Abdel Barr : Times have changed.

Ṣālih Bey : Times do not change. It is we who change.

'A. : Don't you agree with me that our society has undergone change. Don't you agree that money is everything nowadays?.

Ṣ. : And who made it everything? Those you described before as people deprived of conscience and honesty, and those who have betrayed their ideals and joined them ?

A. : There is no need to exeggerate, Ṣālih Bey. No one has betrayed ideals or

disregarded principles. It is only a better way of understanding the needs of life . . . modern society.

S. : Are you compelled by these necessities to confine your thoughts, your activities and faith to the accumulation of thousands and thousands of pounds? ... You have gone through the door beyond which one can never find satisfaction.

'A. : If you had any knowledge of the world of money and business, you would certainly be able to judge that I am a poor man.

S. : Yes. Poor if you compare yourself to one who has collected a million, and when you have accumulated a million you will be poor compared with one who has accumulated two millions. As long as you mount, or rather descend, the steps leading to the hell of greed ... No, it is not the needs of life, but a new creed. A hysterical belief in a power which you, and others like you consider superior to all other powers. ... ..

'A. : This is our modern society, and it is



foolish to ignore the circumstances in which one lives. It is the only language that people understand. He who swims against the tide is soon exhausted.

S. : Except those with strong muscles.

'A. : They may resist for a while, but are defeated in the long run.

S. : The tide can be diverted.

'A. Where have you ever seen such a miracle?

S. : In a country which has sincere leaders, reformers, and prophets.

'A. : Not in Egypt anyhow.

S. : ironically) How strong your faith in your nation is ?.

'A. : It is because I fully understand it.

S. : Exactly. But only in the manner of those who go through that door, and ascend or rather descend the steps of thousands and  
(1)  
millions.

Surprisingly enough the play ends with Sālīh Bey finding himself alone in his outlook. Even his own son, who is a student in the university, expresses his disagreement with his attitude and swears that he will follow 'Abdul Barr Pasha's methods. The play comes to a close with the following dialogue between Sālīh Bay

and his son and his daughter who represent the new generation.

- Sālih. : (disappointed) Will even my own son do so?
- Son. : ( enthusiastically) Yes. I swear I will.
- Sālih. : ( leaving the room, whispering to himself)  
O God, be merciful ...
- Son. : Do you runaway from us, father, because we are not of your opinion ?.
- Daughter : All of us, father, disagree with you. You will never find anybody who will agree with you or follow you.
- Sālih. : I'll standfast on my own. Yes, I WILL. (v)

( curtain ).

However, Tawfiq al Ḥakīm is not always concerned with social problems, but prefers, sometimes, to deal with individual problems. Since he believed at that time that any work of literature should be, in Zola's words " a slice of life " he began writing one-act plays, believing that they would serve his purpose better than any other art-form.

vi - As a close up of his own life, Al Ḥakīm tries, in the one-act play "Sirr el Muntahirat " ( The suicide's Secret ), to stress the idea that unless equilibrium is maintained between mental and emotional activities, one

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(1) See original on p. 348.

can easily be pushed to one or the other extreme.

A middle-aged scholarly doctor, having devoted all his life to study and spurned the joys of love - the lack of equilibrium is fully exemplified here - falls in love with a girl virtually after her death, as he erroneously supposes that she committed suicide because he refused to marry her. In reality the girl was in love with her parent's chauffeur, but was not allowed to marry him. In order to be able to continue her love affair, she decided to marry the scholar. Incidentally, the scholar's and the chauffeur's name is "Mahmūd", a fact which plays a great part in the plot. Being in a very difficult position and to avoid being disgraced, the girl finds it urgent to convince the scholar of her love and make him marry her. When she fails, she jumps to her death from an upper storey window, shouting " I'm dying, Mahmūd". The doctor, who has hardly even paid much attention to the girl, is now convinced that she was in love with him. This mistake effects a complete transformation of his personality. As a reaction against the illusory idea that he is so attractive that a beautiful young girl could fall in love with him and commit suicide when she fails to marry him, the former misogynist launches out on a life of pleasure. Finally the secret relationship



between the girl and Mahmūd, the chauffeur, is found out, and Mahmūd, the scholar is strongly pushed to the other extreme.

-1-

vii - In the one-act play " Sāhirah ", ( A Magician), the playwright tries to establish the fact that human nature has hardly changed in thousands of years. The heroine, Su'ād, though a university graduate, resorts to the help of magic to win the heart of the man she loves. That is, she acts exactly the same as the ancient

-2-

queen " Isis". Surprisingly enough, the magic is effective, but not so much due to ~~its~~ supernatural power as to a kind of telepathic thought transference.

The play is a light hearted comedy : Su'ād , awaiting 'Ezz ed Dīn, the man she loves and wants to marry, asks a cafe waiter, a Nubian, to put what she calls " a piece of sugar " into 'Ezz ed Dīn's cup of coffee. The waiter complies with her wish, but not without telling his fellow-waiter, another Nubian, who disapproves because he suspects her of wanting to poison the young man. Having drunk his coffee, 'Ezz ed Dīn complains of its bitter taste which increases the suspicions of the two waiters. To avoid responsibility

-3-

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( 1 ) pp. 387 ; 414.

( 2 ). v.p. 98-

( 3 ) Nubians are proverbially funny.

the two simple minded men decide to inform 'Ezz ed Dīn, implying that the young lady has poisoned him. The psychological effect of this communication on 'Ezz ed Dīn is enormous. He imagines that he is dying and asks for medical help and the intervention of the police. Su'ād, who has come back, drinks to assure him, the other half of the cup, joking that she wants to die with him. She confesses her love to him, and this revelation, which they both believe to be the consequence of the love-potion, moves him so deeply that he expresses the wish to marry her. Obviously, the two young people were in love with each other, even before Su'ād's visit to the magician, but shyness prevented them from communicating their feelings to each other, so that the alleged love-potion worked by simply removing their inhibitions.

-1-

viii - Urid an Aqtul, ( I want to kill ), is another one-act play in which the playwright ably displays the weakness of human nature. The central figure is a girl with homicidal mania. Her psychiatrist humours her by giving her a pistol loaded with a blank cartridge and telling her to give free vent to her impulse.

In the same building live an elderly couple who are so devoted to each other that neither wants to

survive the other. The play begins with the husband in a private conversation with an insurance agent. He wants to take out a life insurance policy from which his wife will benefit, and seems to be very anxious that the procedure should be carried out confidentially in order not to upset her. It is on this couple that the girl intrudes with her pistol, and she tells them to choose which of them is to die. Here the weaker side of these two people comes to the fore ; although they are both sincere in their professions of devotion to each other, neither of them wants to die when faced with the reality of death. The girl is now convinced that no one is ever really willing to sacrifice his life, even to save the life of his beloved mate. She decides to choose herself and her choice falls upon the wife, but the latter pretends that she is pregnant, which makes the girl change her mind, so that she decides to kill the husband. At this stage the insurance agent comes back for his pen which he has left behind. The choice becomes difficult again, and the girl orders him to stand with the couple, and urges them all to decide among themselves, otherwise she will be inclined to close her eyes and fire at one person at random. Thus the choice becomes very easy, and the couple decides that the insurance agent should be the victim.



Having fired the blank cartridge, the girl feels cured. She has committed her "crime", and fortunately nobody is killed. Yet the husband tells her that she has killed their marital happiness.

The play is not a moral condemnation of human cowardice, nor does it postulate superhuman courage which leads to the sacrifice of one's own life. The playwright has probed the depths of the human heart and knows that, though sincere, it is weak and fallible, that actions always fell short of ideals. He surveys the scene with an understanding smile which is full of kindness and pity.

The playwright's progressive tendencies do not blind him to the disastrous consequences of some social reforms, such as, for instance, the emancipation of women.

-1-

In " Al Nā'iba al Muhtarana ", ( The Honourable Member of Parliament ), the small employee of the Ministry of Works serves the coffee and tends his sick child, while his wife, a parliamentarian, neglects her household duties for the sake of projects which she is unable to carry out for lack of stamina.

ix - Tawfiq al H akīm, who married rather late in life, was considered for a long time a misogynist by

reason of his humorous sallies against the weak sex. This reputation, however, is totally unfounded, for the influence of Shaw and Wilde may partly account for this attitude, and secondly, women were only one of many targets at which this satire was directed. This attitude is exemplified in two plays contained in this collection, "Aṣḥab al Sa'ada al Zawjiyyah", (Happy Marriages ) and the " Quiet Nest", which do not deserve much attention in this context, not because of their inferiority quality, as "The Quiet Nest" is one of his most charming plays, but because they are constructed according to the same pattern as his older plays while the concern of this thesis is with their tendencies.

The main motif of "Happy Marriages" is the contrast between two sisters, one cold and reserved, the other passionate and jealous to the extreme. Both husbands are dissatisfied with their lot and envy each other, one, because he thinks that jealousy must spring from love, the other because he thinks that he would find peace at the side of a quiet wife.

"The Quiet Nest" seems to have been written out of his long celibacy.

Two other plays in this collection which can be considered revolutionary, will be treated in detail. The "Anthill", though a symbolic one-act play differs

from his other symbolic plays in that the symbolic significance is not hidden, but obvious. Chronologically his first symbolic play, preceding "Thou Who Art Climbing the Tree", resorts for the first time to folklore as a dramatic source, and takes its structure from the realities of social life.

-1-

x - "Bayt un Naml" ( The Ant Hill ) is inspired by Egyptian folklore and makes use of the fairy-tale motif that fairies sometimes fall in love with men. This develops into a plot which provides the framework for an exposé of Tawfiq al Hakīm's philosophy on creation, life and death.

The two main figures of the play are the young man and the fairy whose anonymity is meant to convey that they are conceived as types of their kind. The young man, an engineer by profession and highly educated, is ill in bed, and the doctor diagnoses a serious ailment of the heart. His mother keeps his condition secret from him and tries to convince him that he is merely suffering from overwork. Soon it transpires that the young man has a secret that he would like to confide to his mother which he refrains from doing for the time being. The secret is revealed immediately when the mother leaves. First an impersonal voice is heard, and then



the fairy appears in the shape of a beautiful young girl, which personifies the ideal woman of his dreams. He suspects that she is merely a figment of his imagination, but she tries to convince him of her reality by some childish pranks. The dialogue which ensues is worth quoting :

Fairy. : You always try to interpret our playful, invisible games by your human considerations.

Young man. : We cannot do without human interpretations<sup>(1)</sup> in explaining the phenomena around us.'

The fairy sees that the young man doubts the evidence of his very senses and is reluctant to accept her as a real fact. He himself admits that he would rather attribute the lovely vision to a delusion of his feverish brain rather than acknowledge the existence of supernatural phenomena which would shake the foundation of his scientific outlook.

Youngman. : Yes, this would relieve my mind. ... ..

Fairy. Oh, your rational mind ! It is the barrier between you and me.... It is very rare for a fairy to appear to a thinker. We often appear to the simple-minded who receive us with implicit faith, not with the rational

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(1) p. 350 ( see original on page 341 ).

objection. Faith is a doctor which permits us to enter, but human reason is not a measure which can be adequately applied to us. (1)

The fairy sees that the young man is afraid of her because he cannot rationally account for her presence, and resorts to scientific arguments to prove her existence. However, it becomes clear that there is no way by which he could understand her in this world, as human beings are mere ants in comparison with the whole of creation, and the human world an ant-hill when viewed against the background of eternity. So she proposes the only solution possible : since there is no way in which they can communicate successfully on earth, he must shed his human shell and follow her to her world. He is first horrified at this prospect but is finally persuaded, more by scientific curiosity than by love, to take her guiding hand. She points to his heart and says that he will need it there - a reassuring thought, for it seems to indicate that it is love that rules the world of spirits. The symbolic significance of her gesture as well as of the staging of the introductory scene in which the young man is represented as suffering from a "heart complaint" becomes now apparent : in the mental

confusion and uncertainty of human life, it is the heart that provides the compass. It is not said whether he really dies or not, but it is to be assumed that he does, but death occurs on a distinctly hopeful note.

The usually optimistic Tawfiq al Hakim has found again, in this play, a positive solution.

-1-

xi - The second play " Law 'Arafa ash Shabab"

( If the Young only Knew ) is an intellectual play, but different from his typically intellectual plays in that it is fully realistic without the admixture of symbolism or mythology on the one hand, and of intellectual divagations on the other. The situation is strongly reminiscent of Pirendello whose techniques are also strictly imitated. Pirendello's influence which the author admits in the introduction to "Thou ~~Who~~ Art Climbing the Tree" derives not from one, but two plays, "Right You Are" and "Lazarus". The plot is original, and its idea is inspired by the age-old ambition of medical science to rejuvenate men.

The play consists of four scenes in the first of which Siddiq Pasha, eighty years old and suffering from angina pectoris is in the bathroom of his palace trying to dye his moustache, while the doctor is waiting to give him a heart-stimulating injection. The Pasha



desists from his undertaking because he has noticed the extent to which the old age has ravaged his face and which cannot be hidden by any cosmetic devices. This is significant, because it gives impulse to a discussion on the possibility of regaining one's youth. The doctor has studied modern rejuvenation methods and successfully experimented on rabbits during his studies in America. Realizing this, the Pasha convinces the hesitant doctor to apply the results of his research in taking the burden of old age from him and promises his impunity in case the treatment causes his death. They go together into a room, from which the doctor emerges after some time. He soon becomes worried because the Pasha is too long in recovering consciousness. At this very moment a young man in his twenties comes out of the Pasha's room. It is not clear whether the young man is the rejuvenated Pasha or a figment of the doctor's imagination and the subsequent events do nothing to dispel doubt. Neither the Pasha's daughter nor his wife can recognize him ; the daughter considers him a very eligible young man whom she almost prefers to her own fiancee, and the wife calls him son. The Pasha who feels wonderfully strong, and is told by his mirror of the miraculous change in himself runs excitedly out of the room, and the doctor collapses, asking himself : "Am I

sane or mad ? Am I waking or dreaming ?".

In the second scene, more complications develop. The arrangement had been that the Pasha would remain in seclusion until the doctor prepared the family for the inevitable shock, but the disappearance of the Pasha, a politician who has repeatedly held the office of prime minister and is again called to form a government, leads to the intervention of the police. It is generally supposed - and everybody including the doctor soon believes it - that he has been kidnapped and killed. A reward is announced for any clue leading to his discovery, and the Pasha's chauffeur conspires with a detective to obtain the reward. The body of an old man found in a cave is dressed in the Pasha's clothes and buried with due pomp. Meanwhile, the doctor is taken to a mental asylum, and the Pasha, who has been living with the doctor all the time must wait for his recovery.

The third scene deals with an emotional crisis which involves the Pasha and the doctor's wife who disbelieves the Pasha's story. For fear of being thought mad, the Pasha recants and pretends to have been joking. Awaiting further developments the poor Pasha, deprived of his documents and qualifications must earn his livelihood as a small employee. An accidental meeting with his daughter and fiance convinces

him that his fortune which the daughter is believed to have inherited after her father's alleged death, is in danger of being squandered on hare-brained financial schemes. The daughter agrees with her fiance who says that "fathers and their ideas, attitudes and experience must go. The best they can do for us is to leave us in time". The Pasha realizes his mistake and hopes that the doctor can find an antidote against the wonder drug, so that he can regain his former appearance and regain control of the situation.

In the fourth scene the Pasha who has been visiting the doctor regularly at the mental asylum with the wife, and who is sure that the doctor is not insane but merely suffering from temporary mental confusion, tries to cure him by retracing with him, step by step, all the events that led up to his metamorphosis. He explains to the doctor how unhappy he is in his present guise, not only because he has to work in a subordinate position and for a mere pittance, after having been a rich and powerful man and the prime minister of the country, but because he looks like a young man and expects to live his life over again, while he is actually an old man with an old heart hankering after the past. He cannot make a success of the future because he is devoid of the ambition of youth, and cannot enjoy what



pleases young people as he knows the vanity of things ; nothing is new to him but death, and death is the only experience he is longing to undergo. But he sees that he has failed, even in this, when the doctor, far from being convinced that his drug has had such spectacular results, tells his wife that the " young man " is a mental case. The rejuvenated Pasha suggests to the wife of the doctor that the best way to bring back her husband back to health would be to take him to the Pasha's house and reconstruct the scene which led to his losing his sanity : the young Siddiq will be put in the Pasha's bed and the doctor will go to give him an injection. The co-operation of the Pasha's presumed widow is won, the scene is enacted and, exactly like at the beginning of the play, the doctor calls for the Pasha to come out and not to go to sleep after the injection, and after a short interval, the eighty-year old Pasha comes out looking as he did in the first scene.

The audience is kept in suspense for a long time, wondering whether it is a question of a real rejuvenation or merely of a hallucination of the overworked doctor, or, as finally disclosed, of a dream of the Pasha himself who has fallen asleep under the influence of a potent drug. The technique of nightmare plays has been successfully used in this play which adds a lot to the

credit of Tawfiq al Ḥakīm, the innovator and pioneer of contemporary Egyptian drama.

It is relevant to add that in the above-mentioned plays the author has reached the main aim of every playwright who desires, above all, to achieve close communion with his audience. The direct intervention of the author whose own voice is sometimes heard in comment contributes to this success. It must be stated in fairness to Tawfiq al Ḥakīm that his intervention is not artistic device but considered necessary to convey his message which, for him, comes first in all the plays of this collection. The reason is easy to detect. The young Tawfiq al Ḥakīm who professed to be an artist for art's sake, and was accused by the critics of living in an ivory tower and keeping aloof from society has ceased to be detached.

None of the plays is a melodrama but the combination of tragic and comic elements is observable in each of them. Tawfiq al Ḥakīm's peculiar sense of humour prevails everywhere, a fact which proves that he also wanted to entertain.

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iii- In the other play, Al-Mukhrij, (The Director),  
of  
Al Ḥakīm displays his masterful and subtle grasp/subliminal

psychological forces , where he applies both intellect and instinct to the problem of the existence of God. The figure who guides towards truth is a female student of philosophy , who can be the personification of the desired equilibrium . As a woman , she is the psychological representation of the subconscious and instinct. As a student of philosophy she also represents the conscious intellect. It is she who provides the explanation to the film director , who believes in reality , in the world of materialism, alone. The hero of the play , an actor , failing to ~~resolve~~ his confusion of the dream-world with the world of reality , finally identifies himself with Othello , his part in the film. His identification is so complete that it drives him to kill his friend Samīr , the actor playing Iago , and finally to insanity. Despite its depth, and the fact that it deals with intricate matters , this play shows great simplicity in its dialogues , its presentation, and its wittiness , which Al Ḥakīm employs continually except where it deals with very profound philosophical questions. The single act of the play opens with the ~~director~~ returning from the funeral of Samīr. He asks his assistant to run off the film to ensure that the death scene has been properly acted.

D. : Do not forget that I am a ~~director~~. Nothing



matters to me except what happens here on the screen.

A. : What happens in life must matter to you also.

D. : In life ? Life is what I create with my hand here,  
on this screen.

D. : In my view he has not gone. He will always be here  
( pointing to the screen ).

The film is run through to the point where Othello discovers that he has killed Desdemona without cause , and he curses Iago , who was to blame and has escaped. At this point ' Ilwī ,who plays Othello, enters in a state of madness and declares that he has killed Iago and justice has been done. He asks to be led to Desdemona. The assistant promises to do so , and takes him away , so that he can be placed in a mental home. The director then talks to a technician :

D. : We have lost this actor , and he is no longer  
fir for work.

T. : Yes. But unfortunately not for any wrong he  
committed but because he worked well and was  
sincere to his part, he lived in it both on  
and off the screen.

D. : This sort of sincerity has another name among  
doctors of mental diseases.

T. : Yes . To lose oneself in any form of sincerity

is to some extent madness.

D. : The tragedy of 'Ilwī is that he did not shed the role of Othello but remained in the world of unreality even when he left the studio.

T. : He believed that he was living in a real world.

D. : That is an error.

T. : Whose error ? His error or the director who told him to live the role as if it were real?

Al Hakīm then confronts the director and his assistant with the most important question of the play. Ilwī's neice a student of Philosophy enters to enquire about her uncle who escaped from the doctor of forensic medicine. The director feels that she would act the part of Desdemona more ably than the star whom he cast in the part, and tries to employ her. She says that she is already with another Director, for she is doing an M.A., in philosophy on the subject of proof of the existence of God. At first the director feels a great deal of tension and suspicion towards the firl, and the scene with 'Ilwī' has affected him so that he doubts her sanity also. It seems that the author uses this and his gift of witticism to lighten the plot.

G. : Look at that screen. When a film directed by you is shown, ... does the audience see you?

D. : No, certainly not. The director does not appear.

G. : And despite this the audience can form an idea of you , ... your way of directing , your method, and your character.

D. : That ' s true.

G. : Suppose that someone , after seeing your film , went away saying ... " This Director is a mythical figure ". What you say about such a person ? ...

.....

.....

D. : Who doesn't know now that the director is everything in the film ?

G. : So you are responsible for everything that happens on the " screen " ?

D. : Certainly.

G. : And the actors ? These , then , should not be the subject of reward and reckoning.

D. : Have you forgotten that I give the commands ? ..

.....

.....

G. : Isn't Desdemona , at the beginning of the film, unaware of her fate , I mean what the director has in store for her ? ... The future with regard to her is not clear until the end of the " reel " . This reel , which you have in your



case , encompasses all Desdemona's past, present and future . . a reel which records the lives of your characters in their different ages and their decreed destinies. ... It is a " Guarded Tablet " ... What is called chronological order does not exist as far as you are concerned ... You are outside the concept of time and space.<sup>(1)</sup>

Thus Tawfiq al Hakim passes from one question to another until he reaches the very purpose of creation. " The purpose of the Director is to create , and to infuse life in his creation , that is to say, to realise himself.

The play is brought to an end in a way that expresses some of Al Hakim's personal feelings. The Director asks the girl to marry him , but she refuses on the grounds that she likes only the creative artist in him , but does not like him as a person. Al Hakim shows his own problem at that time , in that his role as an artist has led people to forget his human , ordinary side. The play ends in a dialogue between the Director and his assistant demonstrating , at a very deep level , the essence of the whole problem : He " did not see that I am a man " .

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(1) See original on page 332; 333.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Tawfiq al Ḥakīm and Social strife.

Tawfiq al Ḥakīm's "Al Aidi al Na'imah ( Soft Hands ) written about 1958, represents the conciliatory attitude which certainly applies to his conception of equilibrium. It is, one can say, a domestic play, but different from Shaw's domestic plays for it is characterised, besides Shavian intellectual divagation, by the Wildean farcial twist. One needs to add that this play is a link in a long chain of particular type of play by which Al-Ḥakīm has tried to establish an Arabic high comedy, and emancipate the theatre in Egypt from the domination of plays of Najib al-Rihani and Ismail Yasin whose theatre was consistently farcial in plot, characterization and tone.

The theme of this play emanates from the ideology which demands the abolition of prejudices and class privileges through love and mutual understanding, a story of "pride and prejudice": Prince Farid, of the ex-royal family of Turkish origin, is a proud aristocrat with prejudices inherited from his ancestors. He despises the Egyptians, and considers them fellahen in the sense inherited by the previously dominant Turkish class. Of his former wealth he has kept only the palace he is allowed to live in, but which he is not allowed to let or to sell. Now, he lives alone, though he has two

estranged daughters whom he has repudiated because he disapproved of the elder daughter's marriage to a commoner, an Egyptian engineer, and of the attitude of his younger daughter who has gone to live with her. On the Nile, the prince meets Dr. Hammudah, a young philologist who has an academic degree but is somewhat unpractical. He mistakes the philologist for a member of the ex-royal family and reveals to him his trouble with his two daughters. He soon discovers his mistake, but he has already cast off the "mask" of hypocrisy, behaves freely and, as he is highly contented with the companionship of the philologist, asks him to share his palace with him. Hammudah, who likes the prince, finds in the invitation a good opportunity to help his new friend to get rid of illusions and prejudices, and come to terms with the conditions of post-revolutionary Egypt. The two men advertise for a family willing to live in the palace and keep house for them. The prince's own son-in-law, Salim, who would like to help his wife's father, answers the advertisement, and urges his own father and sister, who are <sup>not</sup> known to the prince, to accept the post. Consequently, Prince Farid falls in love with his son-in-law's sister, while Hammudah, who has attended a meeting between the prince and his younger daughter, feels attracted to her. Both Farid and



Ḥammūdāh plan to marry, but the main obstacle is the complaint they have in common, namely their lack of employment and consequent lack of sufficient income. Also both the young ladies make their consent dependent on the agreement of Salim, the engineer, with the result that the prince overcomes his prejudices. The family is reconciled, and the two men who had "soft hands" i.e., who had never done any work, are found useful employment.

In the opinion of the literate audiences and readers, Tawfiq al Ḥakīm has written a Shavian domestic play, but critics who have read his other plays and are used to his gift of witticism, find that he has added little to his former ideas about work and learning, and launched a new assault on the belief in noble lineage.

Apart from the divagations and the subtle dialogue which are mostly Shavian, the way in which Al-Ḥakīm represents the problems of social strife are nearly Wildean. The theme and the attitude are purely his own ; the theory of "equilibrium" is still working in him and affecting his outlook and vision. However, he deals with certain serious problems and propose serious solutions, thus the following disquisition on the function of money in a socialist society.

Mervat. : ... I thought that my husband's main object in life was to enrich himself, but I soon discovered that his real aim is to be productive.

The Prince. : Is there a rich man who is not productive ?

Mervat. : That's what you used to be, father, if you forgive my saying so.

The Prince. : I think I was. But may I ask whether one can be productive without being rich?

Mervat. : My husband wasn't rich, and is still living like any other ordinary engineer in his firm.

Salim. : ... The money owned by any fully productive man is not his alone. It may appear as if it were his own money, but it is not, and a business man may appear to do business in his own interest, but he does not. He labours for the good of hundreds of families, and in order to continue the development of science and industry and mass-production. All capital belongs to the state. Money is only a dynamo in the machine of mass production, and never

for private luxury.

In another place, Tawfiq al Hakin loads the dice in favour of democracy and openly attacks dictatorship. Here is an extract from the dialogue between Prince Farid and Hammudah. Both men are waiting for Salim's decision, but guess from his behaviour that he objects to their matrimonial plans.

The Prince. : In short, we have lost our case.

Hammudah. : Impossible. There is the right of appeal.

The Prince. : Appeal to whom ? There is no higher instance than Salim.

Hammudah. : Is Salim then a dictator ?

The Prince. : What do you say ?

Hammudah. : If he's to have the sole right to decide and permits no one to discuss "the merits and demerits" of the case, he is a dictator.

The Prince. : Stop it. This means that you rebel against him.

Hammudah. : Not against<sup>him</sup>, but against tyranny as such.

The Prince. : Hush ! Walls have ears.

Hammudah. : Better than that we should have  
-2-  
tails.



The principle of "equilibrium" which is the basis of Al Hakim's philosophy, works also in his method of characterization, and influences his choice of personae: some of these personae are flat, but never puppets, others have a reasonable social and political consciousness, but never preach. The mental struggle between both sides is the touchstone that leads to understanding and consequently to the metamorphosis of characters and actions. As a result of this mental struggle, a proud aristocrat, who considered other Egyptians "A race of slaves" has come to the conclusion that "humanity is one family". "I am sorry for the days when we are living in such estrangement. In fact, we are relatives, but I didn't know it. Why do some members of such a fine family ignore the existence of others?".

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Here is another extract this time from the dialogue between Mervat and her father. She is one of the persons who are alive and whom the playwright uses to weight the balance in favour of social consciousnesses.

Mervat. : Our family is of noble birth, you say?  
Please tell me who was the founder of  
that family of noble birth ? He was only  
a poor man, who started his career as a  
tobacco-seller, but worked and succeeded.  
You, his descendants, call that a good

family, a family of noble birth. Tomorrow my husband's descendants will boast of his good reputation and call that a good family. Descent cannot be called good or bad. Good descent is based on work and nothing else.

The Prince. : Work, work, work. Work is for servants and slaves, not for us.

Mervat. : Work is not slavery. It is freedom. <sup>-1-</sup>

The play ends in a way which emphasises the idea that happy endings can be something more than a mere titillation, and that the equilibrium between tragic and comic elements in a modern drama creates an affect greater than that created by almost all Yusuf Wahbi's plays with catastrophic endings.

In contrast to the conciliatory attitude this play shows to the problem of class struggle we have Nu'man 'Āshūr's " Al Nās illi Fūq" which rejects the upper classes and maintains that they have no part in building future society.

## CHAPTER EIGHT.

## MAHMUD TAYMUR; A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH.

To turn from Tawfiq al Hakin to Mahmud Taymur requires the admission, beforehand, that two playwrights may live under similar circumstances and yet their literary output be entirely different. Mahmud Taymur's approach can by no means be described as dramatic. He is, in the main, a novelist and short-story writer, and his dramatic technique, even his subject matter, is very much influenced by the fact that he began and established his literary career by writing short stories, so that his one act plays are dramatized short stories and tradition-bound in their form and approach. Although he is still living, there is a short biography of his existence. The author who wrote his book in constant consultation with its subject, is of the opinion that Taymur never intended his plays to be performed, and that they are "stories in dramatic form". (1). However, no study of contemporary Egyptian drama can ignore him because he is, to an equal extent, with and parallel to Tawfiq al Hakin, a pioneer of the social drama.

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(1) Mahmud bin ash Shirif ; Adab Mahmud Taymur ;  
Al-Kilani ; Cairo ; (S.D.), p .66.



Mahmūd Taymūr's most recent plays are contained in a little volume under the collective title of " Khamsa wa Khumaisa " ( Amulets ). The cryptic title is difficult to account for. It has nothing to do with any of the plays in the volume, which is quite contrary to the usual practice of the author himself who used to chose the title of one of the plays in a collection for the collection itself. All the plays in the volume deal with the evils of society and the foibles and defects of Egyptian aristocracy.

One of these one-act plays at least confirm the opinion that they are only another kind of stories. It is entitled " The Telegram ". There is no conflict whatsoever in this play ; nothing happens in it at all. It is a psychological study : A married couple receive a telegram and everything points to the fact that the news it contains is bad. The whole atmosphere presages evil ; the dog begins howling , the wife has had premonition that something will happen as her eye has twitching which is according to a popular superstition, a bad portent. She fears that the telegram contains bad news from her sister in a distant town and he supposes that a block of flats he own<sup>s</sup> in Alexandria has been bombed ( the time of the play is the second world war ).

A beggar comes to collect his usual alms. The

husband is so nervous that he would prefer him to go and come back another time, but , in spite of that , both husband and wife show even more charity and are more generous than usual, presumably to ward off the impending evil. Neither the couple nor the audience are even told what the telegram contains. The husband tears it up and throws it away - that is all.

The play exemplifies, one can say, the fear of the unknown - Man does not want to face it.

The first one act play in the collection <sup>a</sup> ~~Hakmat~~ <sup>al-Mahkama</sup> ( The court passes sentence ) is a typical <sup>example</sup> of Mahmūd Taymūr's sympathy with human weakness. All possible human feelings are embodied in a series of more or less realistic dramatic characters which always come alive.

The corpse of a newly born girl is found in a well and a peasant woman who was sleeping beside the well is arrested and taken to court. The author well known for his humanitarian attitude , uses the judicial enquiry to introduce his audience to a very simple soul, and leaves her to display her own tragedy, which is, at the same time, the tragedy of <sup>some</sup> other Egyptian women. She is the wife of a very narrow-minded man who wants a son

so much that he has threatened his pregnant wife that he will kill the baby if she gives birth to a girl. Seeing that the baby is a girl, the mother believes she hears the voice of her husband calling her, runs out of the house in a panic, so distracted that she is quite unaware of what she is doing, and throws her child into the well to save her from the "killer". All she can remember now is her husband running after her with his long knife, and that she wanted to save the baby girl from him. She is incredulous, and denies that the child had been murdered, and it is obvious that she is perfectly truthful in doing so. When she realizes , however, that the baby has been killed, she collapses and dies in court. This what Taym<sup>er</sup> considers to be her "sentence".

The play is , thus, a protest against the usual judicial procedure which ignores the motive and psychological background of the case, the circumstances in which the deed was committed, and considers the bare facts only. What gives the play its value is the accuracy of the psychological analysis, the depth of the dialogue which is quite remarkable indeed.

-1-

Al Su'luk ( The vagabond ) is a sharp confrontation of two ways of life ; those who are usually held in respect by society are exposed as not



respectable at all, while the despised ones prove at least to be moral. A lady, an aristocratic widow leading a life of luxury, enjoys the society of a vagabond who adores her without any hope of winning her favours, and plays the fool to amuse her. One day, having won a large sum of money at the races, he shows her the bundle of notes and tells her that he intends to give the lot to a woman with whom he wants to spend the night, and, as his appearance is by no means prepossessing, he asks her whether she thinks that the woman will agree. The lady answers that no woman could refuse such an offer. She is obviously determined to earn the money herself. She summons her servant, has champagne brought and flatters her guest in a rather crude manner. When he realizes what the position is, he feels very disappointed because he has always idolized her, and tears up his winnings. The play ends with the lady breaking down, not so much because of the humiliating situation as because she has lost the money she coveted. She drives him out saying, " Get out you <sup>-1-</sup> dog. Get out you low hasheesh smoker and drunkard".

" Abū Shūsha, <sup>-2-</sup> ( the calf )", is the story of Monis Bey, a wealthy townsman who, having inherited a farm from his father is forced to move to the country

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(1) *ibid.*p. 15

(2) *ibid.*p. 37

to look after it. Though he was in love with a young Cairene lady, Hosniyyah, he marries a country girl, Yusriyyah, who is supposed to fit better into the new type of life which soon absorbs him completely. One of his neighbours, a pasha, comes to see the farm which has become a model farm, and brings some friends with him among whom is his first love, now married Zaza bey. ( The title bey is due, in this case, not to the actual position of the man but to his wealth ). Zaza bey is a type frequent in Taymūr's work, a self-made man who is not yet completely assimilated to the social class into which he has found entrance, for his manners are still unpolished and indicative of his "low origin". He is not happy in his marriage for his wife wants to dominate him completely, although she does not care for him as soon becomes evident when she meets Monis Bey. The old love between them flares up again : they indulge in recollections of their past over old snap-shots taken from Monis' drawer. She invites him to her birthday party and both the hostess and the bright lights of Cairo seem to exercise an attraction more powerful than the new preoccupation with agriculture. This is, however, only temporary : since his prize-calf, Abū Shūshah, is ill, he finds it easy to cancel the visit to the agricultural fair at which it was to be one of

the exhibits, and which clashes with the birthday party. However, the calf recovers, and brings Mohia and his wife together in newly found happiness. There is a third couple, a man-servant and a servant-girl. They are engaged to be married, but the girl hankers after the gay life of the city, and knows that the only chance of realizing her dreams is if her beauty, which is exceptional, can captivate a man of means. Finally she runs off with Zaza Bey.

This play is, on the face of it, merely a light-hearted comedy. But Mahmūd Taynūr seems to pursue certain objectives, for the types satirized are those who pretend to be aristocrats, not the aristocratic class as such. His bias in favour of a useful life in the country as opposed to the idle sybaritism of the capital is very pronounced.

-1-

The farce "Al Mawkib" ( The Procession ) is satirical : when the mask is torn off, certain types of upper-class society are exposed in their hypocrisy. The plot is very simple. The young **king** is coming home and there is a procession in his honour. The pasha, a former landowner now living in Cairo, refuses his permission to let his second wife and his daughter go to the procession and mix with the plebian crowd. It seems, however, that there is no similarity between



the members of the family. The pasha and his elder daughter of the first marriage are very conservative in their adherence to traditions and strict in their outlook, and the pasha's second wife and her children are very dashing and modern. She and her children try to attend the procession by pretending that they are going to assist a friend who is about to give birth to a child. However, the husband of the latter, a bey, calls on the pasha to borrow a belt to wear at the procession, and the pasha discovers that his wife and her daughter have defied his orders and gone to the procession. He himself is unable to resist the temptation, but is ashamed to admit it to his elder daughter. The imminent appearance of the king is announced on the radio which has been playing all the time. The pasha, still without admitting that he wants to go to the procession dons his ceremonial dress and his sword but is still in his slippers. He tries to wrest the belt from his friend, but the belt is torn in two and each winds one half round his waist. They rush out, the pasha still in his slippers. His son-in-law, who has all the time been voicing his disapproval also runs to catch up with the procession, not forgetting to remind his wife to put on her veil.

-1-

"Haflet Shay" ( Tea Party) is a domestic comedy

which sheds a strong light on the triviality and idleness of the pursuits of the leisured classes. But the author - it must be remembered that he is an aristocrat by birth - does not attack aristocracy as such, but the would-be aristocrats, the snobs, or as he terms them " the pretenders ".

The family of Sābir bey want to convince themselves and others that they are important. To find something to occupy her idle mind, Fikriyya Hanım, the wife, has had the idea of inviting the ambassador of a tiny country and a number of prominent people to a tea party : her husband who is the chairman of the Cyclist' Association, has been decorated by the country in question, and they must celebrate the occasion. As it happens, serious-minded/<sup>people</sup> do not turn up, and those who do are types deliberately chosen by the author to exemplify the pretensions and follies of society, however, the number of guests is a good deal smaller than the Sabir's have catered for, and the servant is sent into the street to find volunteers to fill the sitting room. But all he manages to recruit are overgrown schoolboys from the nearby primary school. A complication ensues when the guest of honour, the ambassador, send an apology : he is prevented from coming by the sudden news of an earthquake in his

country. The hosts realize the obligation they have contracted by opening their door to a number of hungry youngsters; they must be fed, and the tea-table, nicely laden according to Egyptian custom, is soon a shambles. At that very moment, the ambassador, who has meanwhile learnt that the earthquake has occurred in another country, sends a message that he is coming after all, and Sabri bey has to use all his authority to keep the boys from consuming every scrap of food. Finally, the ambassador arrives, the decoration is conferred upon the host, and the curtain falls.

The plot itself is meagre enough. What matters is the series of satirical scenes in which the utter frivolity of this idle family is exposed. When the curtain rises, the Sabris, husband and wife, quarrel about the way in which a surrealist picture, bought by the wife for a considerable sum of money, is to be hung, for neither can make head or tail of it. This scene, as well as another during the tea party itself in which another couple quarrel shows the rudeness and mutual lack of respect of marriage partners for each other. It is, one can say, a "comédie de mœurs", which conveys, quite successfully on the whole, a hilarious but very accurate picture of the futility of this life.

It is generally held that Mahmūd Taymūr is an



absolute realist. Even at a time when the fashion for romanticism and romances in historical settings prevailed. Taymūr persisted in the realistic approach, modelled on Maupassant and Chchekov, which can be described as humanitarian because it derives from a compassionate observation of certain sectors of Egyptian life. But one finds, when examining the above-discussed one-act plays, that, in exposing certain aristocratic circles and types, he deliberately avoids the milieu of "genuine aristocracy" to which he himself belongs. The "aristocrats" whom he mercilessly ridicules are of the sham, counterfeit kind, in short, snobs and upstarts. Thus his satire is not directed against principles or social conditions; he does not attack wealth as such, or capitalism as a system. Nor is the exploitation of the poor by the rich a topic that interests him in any degree. His plays are not problem plays, but plays of character and situation, especially character. In this he differs basically from other contemporary writers. While they are mainly attracted by social and class problems, and make the stage an arena to fight out their controversies, or else a pulpit from which to fulminate against "exploitation" and "capitalist corruption", he does not make his plays a vehicle for propaganda of any kind.

It is his aim to entertain which does not prevent his plays from becoming, almost against his will, social documents within their own very narrowly limited compass. The difference between his neutral approach and the "positive" handling of similar themes by Tawfiq al Hakīm is obvious.

An advocate of engaged drama might say that a philanthropic approach, even when accompanied by <sup>a</sup> mastery of dialogue, does not suffice in itself to change a satirical farce into a work of art, that Taymūr, the playwright, does not take up a clear stand, and has no definite ideology. However, a dramatist is not necessarily expected to have a message to convey. He is not a reformer, but a playwright whose frankly admitted objective is to entertain, and as such he is fully successful.

As to his dialogue, whether in classical or colloquial language, it is certainly subtle; it is also naturalistic, conveying the atmosphere of actual life. A very fitting illustration in this respect is the dialogue in "The Court passes sentence" which is fully realistic and abounds in subtle allusions which are, unfortunately, almost untranslatable.

It is necessary to say that Maḥmūd Taymūr's attitude and dramatic technique reached in his long

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play "Al Muzayyafūn", published in 1953, an approved standard. His criticism became lively, varied and genuine. What this play has in common with the above-mentioned collection of one-act plays is the satirical approach which is here half apologetic as he defends the conservative rule not because it is good but because it cannot be improved upon.

However, the title "Al Muzayyafūn" ( Not Genuine<sup>s</sup>) is difficult to account for. One can hardly be certain whether they are the honest, idealist leaders who ought to abide by their principles and stand against the destructive power of exploiting feudalists and professional politicians, but who in stead, abandon their convictions in order to remain in office, or those in the opposition who had only one aim, which is to replace the government and get their share of illicit booty. The idea that politicians under the old regime could only accept what is called a "realistic policy" in order to maintain their main plan of reform is very pronounced. Fully disappointed, Kamil Pasha admits his defeat and withdrawal from the political scene: "It is difficult for us to do a useful deed for the benefit of the country as long as the present conditions remain unchanged. I mean the conditions correlated with politics and social structure. These conditions have



encouraged the gang of decline and corruption to work more actively and, at the same time, have dissuaded those who are capable of sincere deeds . . . All what we were able to do is to resort to calming procedures. <sup>-1-</sup> Amputation was not within any one's power".

It is obvious from the beginning of the play that the corruption of political and public life was the main obstacle in the way of all leaders and reformers of the time. This was due, among others, to the harmful influence of feudalists, and the decline of morality among both men and women of the ruling class.

The play begins with the leaders of "Hizb ul Islāh esh Sha'bi, The Party of Popular Reform, who have won the general election and are expected to form a new cabinet. However, some of the Party' members among whom is its deputy leader, 'Afifi, are reluctant to shoulder the burden of government. It looks as if they are trying to shirk responsibility or are afraid of failure. But in reality they have very valid reasons. They are aware of the fact that the corruption of society is so deep and wide spread that it is impossible to realize any of the political aims of the party which can, consequently, be much more useful if it remains in opposition. Corruption has even invaded the very ranks of the party itself which, in spite of

its noble theories, consists to a considerable extent of capitalist profiteers and opportunists. Thus Mürad, the journalist who wrote the workers column of the party paper and later joins the editorial staff of "Al Fās" ( The Axe), which is the organ of the opposition socialist party, is no more than an opportunist, for whom his defence of workers and peasants is merely an easy way to a political career. He also takes up the attitude prevalent in society at large at the time in question, that it does not matter which party wins because its rule is ultimately bound to be as bad as or worse than that of any previous government. "What have they done, all of them, for the poor workers and peasants?".

In spite of the protest of 'Afīfī, the party undertakes to form a cabinet, in which 'Afīfī himself is a minister. But Kamil Pasha, the leader, soon finds himself face to face with the inevitable domination of his Government by exploiting capital and tries to delude himself that the end justifies the mean, and that he must occasionally betray his ideals to be able to do some good. Finally Kamil Pasha, the defender of constitutional rights and of independence of the judiciary finds himself violating the constitution and interfering with the process of law. A prominent supporter of the

party, Al Ziftawī Pasha, the main exponent of corruption and the leader of the Senate, has a son entangled in an adulterous association, who caught in flagrante delicto by the husband, tries to silence him by murder. To save his son, Al Ziftawī blackmails the Premier, Kamil Pasha, whom he wants to bring pressure to bear on the examining magistrate. The ensuing dialogue is very significant:

K.P. : I've satisfied all your wishes, but what you want this time will affect the integrity of the government.

Z.P. : There is nothing in it to affect the integrity of the Government. Look what others have done. Do you want to change the order of the world?.

K.P. : (coolly) I will do my best to satisfy you, Ziftawī Pasha.

Z.P. : (Also coolly) Do your best? Thank you ! (after a moment of silence )Haven't you heard of the newspaper the opposition intend to publish?

K.P. : Do you mean "Al Fās"?

Z.P. : I've been told that a number of contributors in your paper have joined it.

K.P. : I see !

Z.P. : The supporters of that party are growing in number every day..They are preaching principles which will be of benefit to the



- : country.
- K. P. : Of benefit to the country ?
- Z.P. : People are always tempted by new experiments.  
I myself want to try my hand at something new.
- K.P. : What do you mean, Ziftawī Pasha ?
- Z.P. : The problem is a financial one. I'll sell  
some of my shares in your paper and buy some  
"Al Fās" shares.
- K.P. : ( incredulously ) Will you ?
- Z.P. : (with defiance ) Yes, I will.
- K.P. : Al Ziftawī Pasha, the man who is supposed to  
be a capitalist, buying shares in a newspaper  
which fights capitalism ?
- Z.P. : I'm a practical man. It is one of my duties  
to consider every possibility. Who knows,  
perhaps it is the left camp that will have  
the upper hand. Even if I believe in capital-  
ism today, I don't object to becoming a  
socialist tomorrow, if conditions of life  
make it necessary.
- K.P. : Where do principles come in then ?
- Z.P. : The principles will come to no harm. Have no  
fear.

Kamil Pasha realises the seriousness of the threat  
and complies with Al Ziftawī's wish, a compromise which

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(1) *ibid.* pp. 84; 86

( See original on page 341. )

finally destroys his reputation and political career, so that he has to withdraw from the political arena.

Simultaneously, 'Afifī's private life crumbles when he become involved in an intrigue with the wife of his friend Murād, the editor, who will only divorce his wife if 'Afifī pays him money. Murād has lost his fortune after being foolishly involved in an adventure with a young woman, a journalist of dubious morality. The two themes, Kamil Pasha's political worries and 'Afifī's martial troubles, now run parallel until the end of the play.

The story of "Al Muzayyafūn" culminates in the renewal of good relations between the pasha and his son-in-law, 'Afifī, but on the ruins of their great plans and ambitions. The pessimism of the conclusion is softened by a vindication, by the author, of the moral character of the politicians who, though they have failed, are represented as having failed through no fault of their own, but due to the inescapable consequences of general corruption. Every party and every leader has respectable political aims, but it is seen immediately that "power always corrupts". However, the ideological emphasis of the play lies in two facts: first, that political integrity cannot be divorced from integrity in private life and that, where personal

morality fails, the infection must infallably spread to the public aspect of things; secondly, that the so-called "realistic policy" is nothing but cowardly expediency and opportunism of the worst kind, and is not only ideologically reprehensible, but by no means can ensure success.

It remains to be stressed that this play is technically irreproachable, and is bound to have a strong appeal to the audience. There is also the gallery of well-known Egyptian types, as vividly portrayed as they usually are in the famous novels and short stories of Maḥmūd Taymūr. The author's attempt to vindicate the inherent honesty of politicians is a rare gesture in the post-revolutionary Egyptian drama which tends to condemn them in bulk.



## CHAPTER NINE

Nu'mān 'Āshūr; a revolutionary dramatist.

The remarkable change Egyptian society underwent between the two world wars was enhanced by the 1952 Revolution to the extent that hitherto individual problems assumed national proportions. Some of them coincided with the personal problems of the writers most of whom were recruited from the middle class of society. In view of the strong links between the intellectual class and the peasants and workers which are closer in Egypt than in most other countries, they were also the problems of the working classes.

The velocity and spread of the change was increased by two factors : the adoption, by the new régime, of a socialist ideology, and the stress placed henceforth on the peaceful solution of urgent class tensions.

The conception of equality of opportunity as propagated by the Wafd party in the early 1940's - the opportunity to climb the social ladder was to be offered to everybody in order to avoid the expected clash between the intelligentsia and the capitalist class - had resulted in the replacement of feudal aristocracy by a society dominated by a materialistic bourgeois ambition, with all the repulsive snobbishness

that this involves. This unfortunate consequence was caused by the failure to apply this conception in its true sense. Equality of opportunity is regulated by a number of forces, the chief of which is educational. Only when all the members of the community have completely equal chances of obtaining the best education can one say the society in question offers equality of opportunity.

The limited concession made by the old regime in general was essentially a safety-valve intended to release some of the passions of class conflict which had built up, but this did not result in equality of opportunity since the financial resources remained in the hands of the upper class. It merely substituted a new snobbishness for the old one. This is why revolutionary playwrights began attacking the "social ladder" as it was called.

How egalitarian is man? To what extent is he capable of building a society based on true equality? These two questions form both the starting-point and the crux of Nu'mān 'Āshūr's play Al Nās illi Taht(1), "The people at the bottom". To read or watch this play is a somewhat frustrating experience, for the

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(1) Performed in August 1956.

author makes no serious attempt to fathom the causes of what is, from the moral viewpoint, a social calamity. However, the validity of his criticisms cannot be gainsaid. Various repulsive aspects of the social climber are presented with great accuracy; personal ambition leads to intrigues and acts of ruthlessness, and those who have arrived successfully at the "Top of the pyramid" are often corrupted by petty vanities.

The conflict is one between real and sham values. Al Nās illi Taht reflects the sharp contrast between the "people downstairs" and those who live 'or, in the course of the play, move upstairs. The play is a rejection of the conception of the social ladder which encourages individuals to compete for the room at the top. It is considered unworthy of a socialist society: " Never alone. All of us should have a better life"<sup>-1-</sup>. The words are uttered by the rebel of the working-class family, a young artist who abandons his job as a drawing teacher in a secondary school, " a futile occupation"<sup>-2-</sup> , to "fight a real battle for progress"<sup>-3-</sup>, and to "expose by painting, the ugliness of life we have lived, and portray the life we should live today and

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(1) Al-Nās illi Taht ; Dar al-Nadīn, 1958; p.19.

(2) ibid. p. 19

(3) ibid. p.19



-1-

tomorrow". He refuses to climb the social ladder as his education has made possible for him in the conviction that it is no substitute for collective responsibilities which alone are of absolute value in a socialist society.

The People at the Bottom seems to be a drama of characters, though none of its personae, including 'Ezzat, is exceptional. Each of them tries to make the most of the ordinary business of life. Like the majority of their class, they face ordinary problems and live in ordinary situations. But the general inconsistency of values and outlook creates a conflict between the people downstairs themselves, and between them the people upstairs.

Ragāī, a man descended from an aristocratic family, has squandered his patrimony and come to live with<sup>the</sup> people downstairs in the basement of a building which is the property of Bāhīga. The latter is an aged wealthy widow who believes that Ragāī may be tempted by her wealth and accept her as his wife. He admires 'EZZAT, the revolutionary painter who believes in new artistic trends, and who is, one can say, the mouth-piece of the author. 'Abdul Rahim, a working-class man who has betrayed the trade Union movement in favour of personal advancement, lives with his daughter, Lutfiyya

in another room in the same basement. He considers Ragāī a decadent aristocrat unfit for any job, and disagrees with 'Ezzat, his second neighbour in the basement, whose education would fit him for a well-paid job befitting his future son-in-law. For him 'Ezzat is wasting his time in painting instead of bettering his financial prospects.

Three plots developed concurrently : 'Ezzat having gone to Alexandria to exhibit some of his paintings, Ragāī feels lonely, and agrees to marry Bahīga who has obtained a divorce from her second husband who has deceived her and fraudently appropriated a part of her fortune. Lutfiyya, already dazzled by the promise of the life upstairs, tries to cut loose from the working-class by going to work with Bahīga's rich relative who admires her beauty and wants to marry her.

At this stage of the play, when everything shows that the people downstairs are absorbed by those upstairs, a new hope is seen shining on the horizon ; Fikrī and Munīra, employed as servants in Bahīga's flat, love each other, rebel against their humiliation, and escape from the house to start "a new and more active life". This coincides with 'Ezzat's return to the basement with the prize of the competition.

Ragāī, who is now repelled by his life with Bahīga

to the extent that he takes to drinking nearly all the time, regains hope when 'Ezzat returns to the basement. He realizes that the young artist is no dreamer, and that his new Egypt is a fact which will soon materialize.

However, the gap between 'Ezzat and Lutfiyya seems to be difficult to bridge. The latter has nearly accepted her father's values. She has tried the hard life of the working class, and insists on seizing "her own opportunity" while 'Ezzat insists that to seize individual opportunities is anti-social, and tries to convince his beloved to stand by him.

L. ... But one cannot live on painting alone.

'E. : That is what your father says.

L. : You can't deny it. How can you call yourself a realist ?

'E. : How can I ? How can I go back to my job and sacrifice my object .. my dreams?

L. : You will never be able to live on painting alone, even if you have won the prize.

'E. : Do you think I am interested in money? Never. I want my art to triumph and assert itself ..

'E. : But you've done your duty ... Your future needs to be secured. You are able to live better than that. I am sure you are .....

'E. : Not me alone, Lutfiyya, all of us should live



better than that ...What an I ? What are you? What is your father? Three out of millions. Try to think of other people.... We are the generation who suffered war for six years, and you know what we got from it. We have lived and are still living but at a high cost, in <sup>-1-</sup>straitened circumstances, in a basement.

Lutfiyya, who has already mixed with the people upstairs, discovers that they are "shallow, flat and not of her mould". She confesses that it would have been possible to fall in love with one of them if she had not met 'Ezzat. But she feels unable to stand against her father's will, though she believes that he "has stopped where he is, and will never be able to go <sup>-2-</sup>further than that". 'Ezzat bitterly comments on the whole situation : "Ragāi was born a rich man. But your father, why does he want to scramble up? Why does every one wants to climb up the pyramid and live on the top. The pyramid is already flattening. Soon there will be <sup>-3-</sup>no bottom and top any more.

The elopement of Fikrī and Munīra has already stirred the life of the people downstairs. Ragai seizes the opportunity to encourage 'Ezzat and Lutfiyya the two characters who he believes are able to rebel against the past and build their own future. Addressing Lutfiyya's father, a tram-conductor, he says: Fikrī

is better than you, conductor. He is better than me and 'Ezzat. Munira is much better than Lutfiyya. Neither of them worries about security or accomodation. All they have is their courage and their young hearts. Fikri is right. He says no one dies of starvation".

Lutfiyya rebels for the first time against her father's will and ambitions: "Do you suppose that I can accept Abdul Khaleq as my husband?". But she is still unable to rebel against her Islamic tradition and marry 'Ezzat without her father's consent.

Fully disappointed because of his beloved's hesitation, 'Ezzat decides to leave the basement, and go to fight alone the "battle of his working class": "Fikri and Munira have gone alone. They are not sure whether they will get their supper or spend the night hungry. They only know that they are ready to fight life by their own efforts, and have no fear of the future. They are not like those cowards who die of anxiety unless they get a regularly-paid job ... Nothing is more dangerous than educated people when they are cowards".

Seeing that her lover is going alone, Lutfiyya decides to go with him, with the man "who owns nothing but his strong faith". They both leave the basement bathed in a brilliant beam of light, reflecting the playwright's hope.

Ragāī who lived a life of illusion, gets drunk, and comes to the basement, only to find that 'Ezzat and Lutfiyya have gone. There are only two people downstairs now, Abdul Rahīn, the conductor, and Fatina, another servant who hopes that he will marry her. Ragāī sobers up and addresses his absent friend: "You have realized your dream, 'Ezzat. Now I believe you. I believe in your new Egypt. Alas, I waited to go with you and live in your Egypt, but forgive me .. I have no strength". Relinquishing his room downstairs to Fatna, he says : " I am going to the old-style Egypt and shall never  
-1-  
come downstairs again".

Ragāī occupies an intermediate position between the people downstairs and the people upstairs, thus a veritable tug-of-war goes on between Bahīga, who wants to keep him "upstairs" where, according to her, he belongs, and the ideas of his friend 'Ezzat, who believes that there must be no people on the top nor at the bottom. He returns upstairs, but a broken man. Abdul Rahīn is, on the other side of the stage, recollecting his past days : "It is for her sake ( i.e. Lutfiyya ) that I have debased myself. I let down my fellows, the workers, because of her ....Twenty years of non-stop work ... like a blindfolded buffalo which turns the Sakiah, have lead to nothing". He



realizes, but too late, that he has given the freedom of choice and chosen for himself "an empty and sluggish life that has arrested his mental and emotional growth: work-sleep-work".

The play ends with Bahīga coming to collect her husband who has been drinking again, while Fatma is trying to help Abdul Rahīm into his room. Unable to control his steps, Ragāī obeys his wife and moves towards the door:

- Take care of yourself, Ragāī. You may fall down.
- I've already fallen, can't you see?

( Curtain ).

The playwright is very explicit in his rejection of those he considers corrupted by past ideals : Ragāī, who has seen the light but failed, and 'Abdul Rahīm who has betrayed his revolutionary ideals. For him, there is no blind fate, or undefeatable inherited malaise. Every one can mould his life according to his own free will: "There is nothing called luck or destiny - every one makes his own life".

Although this understanding is accelerated by certain ideology, other playwrights, social realists in particular, represent such figures, apologetically, as victims of society, and try to help them to " discover themselves", but Nu'mān 'Āshūr makes no attempt .

at rehabilitation. He finds that society is better off without them, and lets life pass them by.

Al - Nās illi Fūq:

( 1 )

( The People on the Top ).

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Conceived as a counterpart to Al Nās illi Taht, and written immediately after it, Al Nās illi Fūq (The People on the Top ) can also be considered as revolutionary, since it rejects the possibility of reconciliation between the ex-governing class and the other sectors of society.

As has been said, Tawfīq al Ḥakīm expresses, in Al Aidī al Na'ina, the idea that it is possible for the new Egyptian society to absorb the former governing class, and that the latter can accept without much constraint the new conditions of life. This idea seemed satisfactory to many. Nu'nān 'Ashūr, who does not believe in the good will of the upper class in general, has, however, no faith in such reconciliation. In his opinion, they are not assimilable. Even if they cannot harm the new society, they will never become useful members of it, and will never contribute, in a constructive way, to the growth of the nation. They pretend to be ready to give in, but in practice try to

get hold of the key positions in the state. Thus the defects of this class are stripped of all pretence and spot lighted. They are exposed as what they are; "the drones of society". The behaviour of the two rebels, Titî, the neice of <sup>the</sup> pasha, and Hassan, the nephew of the pasha's wife, is used as a touch-stone of the morality and ideology of the upper class, which shows its readiness to co-operate, but only to safeguard its interests and set back revolutionary steps if possible. They are of no good at all, since they look down on the great mass of the polulation as their inferiors.

More stress is placed on the idea that neither their outlook on life nor their way of thinking can be changed by any amount of new influence, because the evil is deep-rooted. A subtle confrontation between the morality and outlook of the two sides has been made by the playwright, who shows very clearly that the gap is too large to make reconciliation between them possible. This confrontation is sustained by the characters who seem to have been chosen deliberately to represent different types of the upper class, and who are contrasted, for purpose of comparison, with types from the various strata of society. However, the link between them all is, curiously enough, blood relationship. This means to imply that all people are essentially



equal, but only differentiated between according to the artificial barriers that divide them.

'Abdul Muqtadir Pasha is a social upstart who has sacrificed to his political career and personal ambitions all the ideals of patriotism and nationalism. Raḡīqa Hanin, the pasha's wife, is of the same social origin as her husband, but has become fully assimilated to the ex-ruling class, and unprincipled as most of the pre-revolutionary aristocrats. Khalīl Bey the pasha's brother, a man who has neither means nor occupation, sponges on wealthy women, and leads a dissolute life without much consideration for the feelings of his grown-up daughter. There is also Shaikh Qandīl, the private secretary of the pasha. He is an opportunist, a type of frequent occurrence in pre-revolutionary Egypt. He has studied in Al Azhar but has not gone beyond the primary stage. His attempt to ascend the political ladder has proved successful, and he still believes that he can go on playing the same part. The point is emphasised in the play because there were, at the time, many people of the kind of the pasha and his secretary. Also because men like Qandīl, who used to realise their ambitions by flattery and more or less immoral conduct, were still thinking that this was possible in the new society. They are intrinsically

parasites and opportunists. Of this group of characters which are past redemption, the pasha is the more sympathetic, since one feels that he needs help but is unable to accept it, because he lacks the flexibility and the courage to do so.

There is also Hasan, an educated young man in rebellion against the decadence of the aristocracy of which he has first hand experience through his relationship to the pasha's wife whose nephew he is. Anwar, the son of the pasha's maid who, a university graduate suffers from a sort of inferiority complex which makes him very sensitive.

The audience is introduced, in the first act, to 'Abdul Muqtadir's family, the pasha who has been deprived of his title and ministerial authority, but who tries to remain at the head of some organizations. His brother Khalil, who fears that the family' conceit might complicate their financial projects, asks his brother to give up his expensive car and lead a less ostentatious life. The pasha's wife insists on her "status symbol" but is finally convinced by the facts that there is no place in the new life for "the fine lady".

In the second act, which is a wholesale condemnation of the so-called upper class, the pasha's wife,

whose authority in the outside world has shrunk, tries to compensate for it by dominating her husband and other members of the family. At the same time she stages an assault against her brother-in-law, and his daughter. A conflict breaks out within the family itself.

On the other side, Hasan and Titi are in despair. The former, who is a revolutionary, believes that the new society cannot achieve any progress unless it gets rid of the influence of the former governing class.

Titi. : I don't like to see you ( behaving ) like that ...

Hasan. ... How can you like me if I don't like myself?

Titi : What make you ( so depressed ) like that?

Hasan. : I don't know. I always feel bitter. I feel disheartened, and everything is dark before me.

Titi. : Why, Hasan? You used not to be like that.

Hasan. : It seems that there is something in our life that makes us so lethargic, as if we had just awakened from a long sleep and were still yawning.

Titi. : Is that why you are being so sarcastic ?

Hasan. : No, Titi. I am not just being sarcastic. I wonder if we are fully awake. Why does our life still suffer from that nightmare ?



Titī. : What nightmare, Hasan ?

Hasan. Aunt Raqīqa and her husband who dominated our past and still want to control our future ; your father who wasted his life and still wants to destroy yours ; and Shaikh Qandīl who  
-1- continues to feather his nest from all sides.

This satirical scene, full of bitter criticism, ends with a scathing epigram of the type which is characteristic of the art of Nu'nān 'Āshūr. Umm Anwar, the pasha's maid, asks his sister-in-law for her daughter's hand on behalf of her son Anwar, a well educated man who is still suffering from the stigma of his humble origin and she hopes that Hasan, the rebel against the so-called class barriers, will stand by then. But the girl's mother, to whom the idea appears totally unacceptable, calls on Hasan to end the scene without offending her visitors.

The mother. : My sister Raqīqa must agree first. She must say "yes".

Hasan. : Aunt Raqīqa doesn't know how to say "yes" mother.

Mother. : Do you think we do, my son.

Hasan. : We have never said anything else. All  
-2- our life has been "yes, yes, yes".

Titī tries to pronounce the word "ah" which means

"yes" in the same way as Hasan, that is as if it were an expression of pain, and asks the mother to imitate then, but the latter is reluctant because she has high blood pressure. Umm Anwar asks what is pressing on her, and Hasan answers ironically : "The people on the Top". The scene closes with this typically Egyptian joke.

In the third and the last act where the playwright takes the audience further inside the pasha's palace, the hitherto separate threads of the play are gathered together. The conflict between "The People on the Top" takes the form of sordid intrigues and extreme hatred and suspicion until the pasha's wife, for whom there is obviously no room in the new society, suffers nervous breakdown. When the dispute in the Pasha's family reaches its climax, Hasan tells Tītī, who can stand the strain no longer and insists on staying with them far away from the "decadent aristocratic life": "This is exactly what one would expect. They devour each other, since they cannot devour us."

The relation between the two rebels, Hasan and Tītī, is not brought to a happy conclusion in the play. They do not marry, but one feels that they have come to understand each other and will become husband and wife in the end. The play closes with a dialogue between the pasha and his wife. The pasha is in a state of mental

confusion and fears that his wife will poison him. He feels lonely and forsaken by everything.

The pasha. : I want Qandīl. I want him to write my political memoirs, and give them to the people before they forget me.

The wife. : Stop talking nonsense. Will anybody remember you after now?

The pasha. : How, Raqīqa ? ( pointing to the audience )  
Then why have these people come here ?

The wife. : To see you make a spectacle of yourself.

The pasha. ( to the audience ) To see me or to laugh at her.?

The wife. : Draw the curtains ( pointing to both sides ). That's enough. You have shown us up.

The pasha. : No, leave them open. Please don't go.  
Don't leave me alone. She will poison me.

The wife. : Come here. Whom are you talking to.

The pasha. : Look Raqīqa. The people are applauding me.

The wife. : They are applauding your failure.  
Come, let us go.

Curtain.



The reference to the curtain is intended, one could say, to mean that the playwright considers the play as the last word on this subject. It can also be interpreted as an exhortation to other playwrights to regard the subject of the failure of the former aristocracy as exhausted and , so to say, stop "flogging a dead horse".

However, the short synopsis of the content fails, in more than one place, to convey the inherent humour of the situations. But Nu'mān 'Āshūr proved very successful indeed in using many subtle hints and veiled allusions which make the exertions of the socialites appear ridiculous. The play which is amusing throughout, becomes excruciatingly funny in places.

It is relevant to note that each of Tawfiq al Ḥakīm's *Al Aiddī en Nā'ima* and Nu'mān 'Āshūr's *Al Nās illi Fūq* represents the opinion of Egyptian people at a particular stage of its development. Tawfiq al Ḥakīm writing in the early days of the 1952 Revolution, reflects the mood of optimism current at the time, when a sense of triumph induced a confidence that problems such as class conflict could be easily solved. Nu'mān 'Āshūr wrote this play in 1958, at a time of sober reappraisal and disillusionment when, the difficulty of solving these problems had been appreciated. This

marked the beginning of the attempt to build a classless society through the abolition of feudalism and capitalism.

One might add that Nu'mān 'Ashūr's approach in this play is essentially one of disappointed hope: a feeling that the "People at the Top" namely the aristocratic class, are worthless and ruthless, that reconciliation with that class is impossible, since the aristocrats will seize the opportunity to infiltrate the new society and corrupt it. They preserve their selfishness, corrupt values and petty ambitions to hold key positions, thus representing a dagger directed against the new generation (1) and the remnants of an age that has died, and ought to be buried as soon as possible.

Nu'mān 'Ashūr's play "Āilat ed Dughrī"(2) ( The Family of the Straight Man) is a landmark in Egyptian drama. It satirizes bitterly the post-revolutionary society, a field which had remained hitherto unexplored by other playwrights. It is also symbolic, for the "Dughrīs" stand for the Egyptians in general.

In this play, as in other plays, the characters are selected purposely and carefully to represent a cross-section of Egyptian society. The spectators

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(1) Tawfiq al Hakīm clearly expressed this idea in the 1930's: V. Al Lis, p.137 (2) Performed 1963.

know them all and treat them with indulgence, sympathizing even with their foibles, because they are made conscious of facts of which they have been hitherto but dimly aware. In spite of the insistence with which post-revolutionary Egyptian society stresses its socialist outlook, in the play, as in life, there are several types whose tendencies can by no stretch<sup>of</sup> human imagination be termed socialist at all.

One of the characters is the family servant 'Alī et Tawwāf. This "uncle 'Alī", who is representative of the peasant in particular, - he is described as "the man who feeds everybody with fresh bread, but is himself hungry" - is still barefoot and insists, throughout the play, on getting a pair of shoes. But when he finally gets them, he cannot bear to keep them on; "the seventy years of hard life have calloused his feet" so that they cannot stand the constricting of the footwear.

One might say that Uncle 'Alī symbolises a very accurate social fact in post-revolutionary Egypt. The National Charter guarantees fifty per cent of the seats in parliament and other constitutional organisations to peasants and workers, but some of them are reluctant or unable to shoulder the responsibility. The ensuing dialogue is a subtle comment on the whole situation.

Uncle 'Alī. : I don't like shoes at all. They compress



my toes. Take them back ( he throws the shoes on the floor ).

Hasan. : I told you from the beginning that you would go barefoot to your grave ...

Uncle 'Alī. : I Don't want them. Give them to somebody else.

Hasan. : Who else ? There is no one but you.

Uncle 'Alī. : There are many barefoot men.

Hasan. : But they are made for you, to measure.

Uncle 'Alī : You should have given me some from the start.

I have been asking for them all my life, but  
: none of you remembered me.

Hasan. : God will remember you tommorrow, Uncle  
-1-  
'Alī.

This idea is emphasized again and again throughout the play which comes to an end in a way characteristic of Nu'mān 'Ashūr who always likes to address the audience directly before the curtain falls:

Uncle 'Alī. ; You are better off now. Better than before.

Hasan. : But you are still as you have always been,  
Uncle ' Alī ; still barefoot.(takes the shoes in his hand), you don't even know how to put on shoes.

Uncle 'Alī ; What did those who have shoes do ? They made me walk barefoot. You made me walk

without shoes.

Hasan. : ( calls on him, still shoes in hand ) You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Take your shoes.

Uncle 'Ali. : ( coming back and taking them ) May God forgive you, Hasan.

(Looking at the audience ) May God forgive  
-1-  
you all.

C U R T A I N .

The individual attitudes and opinions of the characters of the play are subtly differentiated between. Sayyed, the eldest, a bachelor, who places the interests of family before his own, is, with his immeasurable kindness of heart and great sincerity and generosity, his readiness to forgive, and his remarkable sense of humour, a typical Egyptian figure. His brother Muṣṭafa, a university graduate and school-master, is his direct opposite: selfish and money-grabbing. The third brother, Hasan, who has completed the secondary studies but could not go to the university because his eldest brother and provider, Sayyed, has lost his income, is a professional footballer or, as he terms himself, " lives on the earnings of his feet". It is his main fear that the family will disintegrate due to Muṣṭafa's personal

ambitions. The two sisters, Zainab and 'Ā'isha, have, as one should expect, an apparently passive attitude towards the main problems of the family. They even support Muṣṭafa who tries to usurp the authority of the elder brother. There is also Abū er Riḍa, a man who used to work as a clerk in the Dughri' bakery and has made, not always honestly, a lot of money, and who now wants to buy the family residence. Abū er Riḍa's son, Sāmī, an honest man and likeable in spite of his physical ugliness, is a revolutionary in more than one way. There is finally Karīma, Muṣṭafa's wife, a simple and naive woman, but a paragon of all the virtues, who loves all the members of her family because hatred has no place in her heart. Together with a number of minor characters, the Dughris constitute a vivid and accurate picture of Egyptian society.

The plot, which consists of many intricately interwoven threads, is difficult to unravel and still more difficult to grasp: The Dughris have inherited a house from their father, a baker, but they do not know that it was mortgaged in an emergency. It is obvious from the very start that the family will break up because its only educated son, Muṣṭafa, quite unexpectedly turns out to be an egoist who wants to sell his share of the house, cut himself off from his family and his past,



divorce his wife Karima who is also his cousin, and marry a rich widow and lead an independent life in a luxurious villa, unencumbered by family responsibilities. His brother Sayyed chides his selfishness:

Mustafa. : Listen. I don't want to be harrassed by you.

Sayyed. : Look, Darsh ( Mustafa's nickname) Let us be frank. We are brothers. If I keep apart, it is in my spirit only. I am with you all with my heart and mind. Where would you go to ? Even if flew into space, you would not be able to leave us behind on our earth.

Mustafa. : Why couldn't I ?

Sayyed. : Only if you change your name.

Mustafa. : I don't understand.

Sayyed. : One cannot cast off one's skin all at once. You have had education, you have found a job, you have grown to be a man of value, while your brothers and relations have fallen low in the scale. And you refuse to share your good fortune  
-1-  
with them.

Mustafa has convinced his two sisters of the

necessity of selling the house, and severed his relations with the family, but his personal ambitions collapse one after the other. The rich widow turns out to be a pauper, and the sale of the house does not materialize, for Abū er Riḍa who has learned of the introduction of rent control, is reluctant to conclude a bad bargain.

Sayyed himself used to be<sup>a</sup>/wealthy, fashionable tailor, but, faced with the choice of giving up his business or the family house, he renounces his business, and pays off the mortgage. He is incapable of making a new start, but he ,(with the modest sum he earns by indoor work ) is still the provider of the family, keeping them all, even Karīma, the wife of his educated but selfish brother. He does not even want them to know about the sacrifice he has made to keep them together. He is suspected of aloofness, of living like a "recluse", because he cannot help brooding about the change in his circumstances.

Muṣṭafa and Abū er Riḍa clash, but the former's son, Samī, marries 'Āisha, and Karīma, after the disappointment in Muṣṭafa which nearly breaks her heart, marries Sayyed. The family can remain together, but Muṣṭafa takes no part in the happy reunion.

The play, which is a satire on the egoism rampant

among the Egyptian intelligentsia, criticises bitterly escapism and passivity:

Zainab. : I wish I were able to live like a recluse  
as you do.

Sayyed. : I'm not living like a recluse, Zainab. I  
am living in my heart with you all.

Zainab. : It is not only you. Everybody lives like  
that. Everybody lives in a secluded re-  
treat. Look around yourself. Does anybody  
trouble about his brother ? Does anybody  
(1)  
think of anything but his own self.

Passivity is exposed in more than one way ; when Sayyed goes to his room, totally depressed because of Mustafa's behaviour, Hasan stops in the centre of the stage and asks himself : Should I go to see Sayyed or had I better go to my room and relax ? A moment of reflection and then he is seen going to his room.

It is said that Nu'mān 'Āshūr is a "popular edition " of Tawfiq al Ḥakīm. Though he follows the same lines and deals with problems within the same social framework, he is easier to understand. It is true that he lacks the philosophical depth of Tawfiq al Ḥakīm, but his ties with the social life he portrays are often closer. His approach is naturalistic, while

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(1) Inid.p. 146



Tawfiq al Ḥakīm's is often either figurative or symbolic and there is a strong tendency towards scrupulous documentation, which is also observable, even to a greater extent, in plays by other contemporary playwrights.

## CHAPTER TEN.

Fathī Radwān ; a promising playwright.

Fathī Radwān, known as an extreme revolutionary and a prominent member of Misr al Fataḥ party, left in the early nineteen forties, the party and politics to devote himself entirely to his career as a lawyer. Under the new régime whose policy it is to enlist the co-operation of all revolutionary elements, he was nominated minister for national guidance, an office he held for a short while. Fathī Radwān's political career is noteworthy in that it is exemplary of the ideological confusion dominant in politics at that time.

-1-

Shaqqa Lil Īgar ( Flat to let )<sup>1</sup>

His first play ( Flat to let ) is a documentation of this fact. One of its characters, Shaikh Tūlān, says, in a conversation with the revolutionary Mandūh: "Men like you turned to religion first, but went away disappointed to look for something else." This is a reference to the author's own generation.

What the playwright most successfully transmits is the general atmosphere of the time ; the feeling of unease and unrest, the awareness of impending change. Change is in the air, whether for better or for worse,

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(1) Sha'qq Lil Īgar : Kutub Lilgamī'; 1959.

whether war or revolution - it is not explicitly stated what it will be and what it will bring in its wake - what is there is only the deep consciousness that things cannot go on very much longer the way they are. Striking is also the remarkable solidarity of the people. Thus when Mamduh, the revolutionary gets into trouble, everybody hurries to help him, though he is not even known to them.

However, the play is peculiar in that, though it appears to be a play in three acts, it consists in reality of three one-act plays. Consequently, it has no hero, i.e. no central figure. The characters are different types of men and women who meet accidentally, form new temporary relationships and separate again. The accidental character of these happenings is, perhaps, intended to illustrate the disorientation of Egyptian life at that time. The author seems also to be determined to intervene directly at certain points of the action. His voice is often heard, and is often overpowering and strident. The plot, or what there is of it is meagre and that is why the play would be condemned by a critic merely interested in theatrical viability. Its literary value, however, is considerable. It is as has been already said, a document of its time, characterised by faithful observation, enlightened approach and valid



criticism of the conditions portrayed.

The first act, which has little to do with what may be considered the plot of the play, is used to impart a general impression of the situation of the country. Prospective tenants who come up to view the flat are aptly chosen to give a cross-section of the population; they are typical figures of the kind one usually meets in the streets of Cairo and other Egyptian towns: 'Abdul Mughīth, the porter, a jack-of-all trades who, in spite of his versatility, lives in dire poverty. He is the typical man in the street ; as he describes himself : "At one time turban on my head, another time a tarbush; with shoes on my feet or bare-  
-1-  
foot ; in the guise of a shaikh or an effendy". The landlord, Zahrān, is the typical representative of a class of society which emerged during the second world war ( ghani al harb ) ( war profiteer ). Although characters of this kind appear as stock figures of the farce and are, in a strongly caricatured form, the target of many jokes, Zahrān is not a mere figure of fun, but satirizes in dead earnest. When he is derided, the derision has a tinge of bitterness. Shaikh Tūlān, who is strongly preoccupied with religion, is deeply dissatisfied with the Westernisation which is observable in women's clothes and the new way of thinking. 'Ezzat,

a rich middle-aged man about town who, though the father of a family consisting of a devoted wife and two teen-age daughters, cannot renounce his playboy habits. E'tidāl, or the girl one might call "The respectable prostitute", is, in spite of everything, a woman with morality and conscience. She lives with her sick mother in extreme poverty. Her mother who knows that she is dying, has only one dream : to be buried with the proper ceremonies. A funeral costs money, and that is why E'tidāl decides to sell herself. She confesses it to 'Ezzat in a fit of anger and remorse, and it is this actual story which provides the impulse for his consequent metamorphosis. Murād a young rebel and leading member of an underground group with socialist tendencies is hunted by the police and is, for this reason, always restless and suspicious. There is also Tsnshhudāt : a by-product of the movement for the emancipation of women, or as described by shaikh Tūlān: "Such a girl has been spoilt by the mood of the time to such an extent that she has ceased to be an Egyptian without having become European" ; then there is Diāb, the man from the secret police. They all know what he is, resent it, and want him to know that he is not welcome. This attitude against Diāb is meant to demonstrate the general attitude of the people towards the

government to which they are in decided opposition. Their resentment against the representative of the government is contrasted with the enthusiasm with which they treat Mamdūh and the spontaneous response to protect him. There is finally Marco a representative of those who exploit the wealth of the country without making an effort to contribute to its development.

At the end of act one, 'Ezzat Bey, who has rented the flat for clandestine extra-marital rendezvous, is seen in conversation with E'tidāl when he invites without shame to share the night with him. But when she tells her story which moves him to pity, his conscience is roused and he feels remorse. He wishes to give her all the money he has on him, but not to embarrass her, he tries to put it surreptitiously into her handbag. Thereupon the girl confesses that she has already stolen ten pounds from his pocket. However, this does not break up the newly formed friendship, as he has evidently taken a liking to the girl who is his daughter's age.

However, the flat is not used by 'Ezzat Bey alone. The porter, knowing that he needs the flat only occasionally for hours at a time, has permitted Mandūh, the revolutionary with whom he sympathizes, to instal his printing press and print his leaflets there. When the police appears on the scene, E'tidāl convinced



that they are the moral squad in search of prostitutes, escapes through the back entrance. The police arrest 'Ezzat Bey whom they mistake for one of the revolutionaries. Though he is released after the real culprits are apprehended, and spends only a short period in detention, his social and political conscience is awakened. The dialogue between him and his lawyer is illustrative of the change:

'Ezzat. : Forget about this case, and listen to this fascinating human story. My case is of no importance. I have stolen the thunder of a decent man who has defied the authority, preaching revolution; a man who lives in constant danger .... I have been put in this prison as a thinker preaching freedom, but in fact I am a drunken fop, hardly worth a farthing. They have imprisoned me as if I were a real man, but virtually I am sub-human. I should be in the Animal Hospital ... You don't know what spiritual pangs I suffer though I have never been so happy before as I am in this place...

Lawyer. : (Who thinks that 'Ezzat has a part in the conspiracy) You are really a great

man. ....

'Ezzat. : ...I used to drink, and had no time to see what was going on round me. Come along, worthy lawyer. Shed your barrister's gown, and come and stay in this prison for a few days. You will see that it is Egypt that is imprisoned. You will find various forms of poverty and disease, sick people, ill with T.B., people who are insane, human beings robbed of their honour ... My fellow-prisoners are compelled to sell their honour in order to live ... ..(1)

Also when he is shaking hands with E'tidal and notices that her hand is slightly trembling, he says: "You are trembling, and so am I , and so are all my fellow-prisoners, and millions outside the prison tremble for fear ... we are all afraid of one another. He confesses that his experience with the poor girl has changed him a lot, changed him" into a human being".

However, 'Ezzat's metamorphosis comes so suddenly that one is inclined to think that the author is more concerned with situations and elaborate sentences. When he is charged, and listens to one of the incriminating leaflets read out to him by the police superin-

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(1) V - pp. 77 ( See original on page 346 )

tendent, he finds himself surprisingly wholehearted in agreement with the revolutionary postulates.

The play has been compared above to three one-act plays. The author, who has made desperate attempts to make it appear an organic unity, has succeeded, to a certain extent, in establishing a connection between the first and second act, but he has failed in the third. Having left the prison, 'Ezzat feels unable to continue his "immoral life", and yet incapable of being a revolutionary : " I am destined to live in a vacuum. I have been uprooted and left in mid-air ". But his experience with E'tidāl has been so deep that he is now possessed of the wish to help the poor. Thus he is seen, in the third act, working as the chairman of a welfare society a committee of his own equals, consisting of old pashas and upper class men, whose hypocrisy and pretence are strongly satirized. This "episode" is not too convincing, and it seems that the author represents 'Ezzat as unworthy of joining the real revolutionaries only so as to bring in and satirize upper class types.

The play comes to a close on an optimistic note when 'Ezzat tries to persuade E'tidāl to marry the man she loves, Sāmī, but she insists on rejecting the idea of being married to any one. She does not want " to



have children who will have reason to be ashamed of their mother's past ".

'Ezzat. : Is it the end of the story ?

E'tidāl. : No it is the beginning. We shall all live free from our past, looking for a new hope.

'Ezzat. : I would like to believe that this is the beginning, and not the end. I would like to believe that each of us will live free from his past, looking for a new hope.

( Curtain )

Ilāh Raghma Anfih:(2).

In his latest group of five one-act plays, published under the collective title " Ilāh Raghma Anfih " ( The unwilling god ), Fathi Radwan transgresses the limits of the original problems to deal with man as such in his struggle with his own self, with the superstitions and traditions which he finds himself forced to fight and oppose. No matter whether he is victorious in his struggle or defeated. He is not regarded by the author as a mere guinea-pig to be dissected, or as an object of psychological curiosity.

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(1) V.P. 112. (See original on page 346)

(2) Dar al-Ma'arif ; 1962.

Thought very interested in what makes man function, the author neither probes nor blames, but reports, describes and advises. In that, his approach is deeply humanitarian and sympathetic.

However, the collection is inspired by anger, perhaps despair, but not defeatism. It is inspired by what angers him particularly against hypocrisy on the individual as well as on the communal level, the misuse of religion for personal considerations, superstition and the domination by pseudo-religious leadership. Occasionally his approach is symbolic, as in "The Hangman and the Man to be Hanged".

The one-act play "Ilāh Raghma Anfih", the first in the collection, is said to have been inspired by a curious item of information in the press to the effect that the prime minister of a far eastern country, having learnt that a statue of him had been put up in a Buddhist temple in the belief that he is the reincarnation of Buddha, has to send the police to have the statue removed. In Fathī Radwān's adaptation, the prime minister goes to break up the statue in person.

The first scene of the play shows the priests in the act of worship, burning incense before the statue of Zahmū, the prime minister. They are five in number, one higher in the hierarchy of priesthood than his

companions. They believe, because of an old age prophecy that Buddha will descend to earth in their time. Also the description of the god in the prophecy tallies exactly with the appearance of Zahmū. Thus the priests are in a state of spiritual excitement, expecting the god incarnate to visit the temple. Suddenly they catch sight of "him", but surprisingly enough, they notice by the dim light of candles that the statue of one of the gods has been damaged. They try to chase him away first as an intruder, but when they see him, they fall overawed on their knees. However, one of the junior priests who was a politician before joining the priesthood, is still faintly sceptical. His doubts are strengthened for a time because he finds Zahmū's attitude frivolous, but when the latter, accidentally, asks for bread and water, he is confirmed in his belief, as the god incarnate, according to the prophecy, is expected to do that.

Zahmū tries faithfully to suggest to them that they might be wrong in their calculation, and fails, Guessing that the ex-politician is less firm in his conviction than the others, he addresses his argument to him, but finds that he has met with a very astute opponent, whose irony is a powerful weapon.

Suspecting that the complications may have been



brought about by a manoeuvre of the opposition, Zahmū suggests that when they revise their calculations, they might find that it is the leader of the Opposition and not himself who is the incarnation of the god, but they insist on the accuracy of their prediction.

Zahmū tries again to approach the ex-politician monk; he tells him that he does not want his plans for the welfare of his people to be frustrated " by his being proclaimed a god ; that he can realize his progressive program of reform " only as man and a leader of men, but not as a superhuman being with supernatural connotations ". The ensuing dialogue is very significant:

Zahmū. : Then any discussion is useless. It is question of a trick of the opposition, but you priests do not understand. ....

Monk. : Tomorrow your work will be the work of a god. You will be freed from your prison which is full of boasting men ... The poor will come before you, and you will live with the weak and listen to the complaints of the unknown defeated and outcasts.

Zahmū. : This is exactly the programme of my party. This has been my work since I went into politics, and I have been in and out of

prison for that . . . . .

Monk. : You went to prison with the arrogance of self-confidence, aspiring to authority. You must learn how to be modest, and suffer the pain of the modest. You must learn how to live a simple life without greed, ambition, hope or elevated position, for this is what a god does.

Zahmū. : There is no one among politicians who was more conversant than me with simplicity, modesty and devotion to the poor. I have made speeches and written articles and travelled and . . . . .

Monk. : The weak and the poor were a mere electioneering slogan. Your simplicity is only a screen hiding your conceit which has, in fact, no limits. Your sins will be redeemed from this day on in the purgatory of modesty.

Zahmū. : (losing his temper ) Stop preaching at me priest ... I cannot stand this hypocrisy.

Monk. : Hypocrisy ?

Zahmū. : Yes, hypocrisy. What are you doing with your gods, temples, incense, hymns and

waving robes, and the idols on which you  
spend thousands taken from the mouth of  
the poor, hungry, the sick...

... There is more luxury in these temples  
than in the palaces of the rich... Do idols  
and superstitions..... come from god?

Release Man from Your Destructive Tute-  
-1-  
lage: he knows his way now.

At dawn, the faithful, attracted by rumour, flock  
to the temple and prostrate themselves before Zahmu.  
This infuriates him, and he seizes his axe and proceeds  
to demolish the idols, shouting that he will remain a  
man in spite of them.

The situation is pathetic and original enough to  
require no comment. It can be considered glorification  
of the eternally human which is superior to the divine  
in its sympathy and suffering, and in the precedence  
it gives to practical social endeavour over the joys of  
religious communion and the elation of mysticism. The  
way in which the author breaches the all-important  
problem of poverty and disease brings it within the  
compass of the social-purpose drama.

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(1). V.P. 33 ; 36. (see original on page 347)



-1-

" Laitahu Māt " ( Would that He were dead ) is also satirical. Shihāb, a middle-aged man, is generally considered by his young wife and grown-up children a very just and worthy man. But he knows deep in his heart that he has led a sinful life. Having been taken seriously ill, he is expected to die, and he is aware of it. His doctor, who believes he is unconscious, tells the wife that her husband is dying in peace, and promises to visit him from time to time until life has gone. However, the man who is believed unconscious for a long period of time, is able to hear, and sometimes to see what is said and what is going on around him.

As there is a belief that if a man confesses a sin to the person he has wronged, and obtains his forgiveness, God will also forgive him, Shihāb admits to a handyman who has spent years in his service that when he once requested the help of his wife he really had evil designs. He also confesses to his own wife his lapses from conjugal fidelity, and asks them all to forgive him. Although they forgive him readily at first, it becomes manifest when he fails to die soon that they never forgive him.

Although his confession has been motivated by good will, the wish " to tear off the mask of double dealing

and lies ", his experience of human hypocrisy is shocking. He sees, in his conscious spells , that his wife and his elder son wear the same mask of double dealing and lies. He sees his young wife responding to the flattery of the young doctor, and that his son is really pleased in anticipation of a rich inheritance.

Finally, Shihāb is seen abandoned by his wife and other members of the family, but he feels quite strong and able to face life alone : " I have paid my debts, and am no longer afraid of anything. I no longer feel  
(1)  
the pain of remorse ... " In an ironical way, he tells his doctor, the man whose miscalculation urged him to confess his sins : " I have exposed myself and appeared as I really am, that is as every human being really is. They all hated me because they hated to see themselves. They were ready to forgive a man who was supposed to be passing away, but i didn't ... All the hypocrites who ran away want me to understand that they were disgusted when they knew me as I really am, but they do not know that I have also seen them as they really are. ... I do not show disgust because now I know people and am ready to take into account their strength as well as  
(2)  
their weakness ". The problem of this one-act play, transcends also, the aspects of local and even national

life, and is given general validity.

" Al Maiyit al Sakhir"(1) ( The Ironical dead man) is believed to be a comment, though deadly satirical, on real events in its time. Mugaddid, the leading character of the play, is a promising young writer who, according to the then "cultural monopoly" , is unable to get his writings published, and his ideas and revolutionary tendencies judged by his readers. He induces a journalist to fabricate a story about his tragic death, which also will be the subject of a series of articles in the daily press, revolving round his poverty and the dismal circumstances of his life. He "wants to profit by the tendency of the public to shed tears of sympathy over the dead whom they ill-treated in their life-time. The journalist, in search for sensation accepts the idea which he hopes will boost the sale of his paper. It is planned that Mugaddid, disguised as his own grand-father, will go on writing for "posthumous" publication. But the unknown writer, a real artist at heart, revolts after a while, though his genius is fully acknowledged by the public as well as by all literary circles. He refuses to continue deceiving the people : " This experience has filled me with disgust ... What I have seen is horrible and unbearable.

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(1) ibid p. 69



People labour everywhere under a heavy burden of lies. Each of us is entitled to find a place for himself by his work alone. I know it is difficult, but it is the only way if mankind is to be happy. (1)

The abuse of religion is the subject of another one-act play in the same collection, " Al Mu' hallil"(2) A young aristocrat has triply divorced his beloved wife and is not allowed to take her back. It is time for her to seek happiness in another marriage. But instead, the husband has recourse to the service of a "muhallil and his choice falls upon one of his acquaintances, a poor but very honest man. Full decorum is observed, but in spite of that, the wife refuses to be divorced from the man whose character she admires. The play reaches its climax when <sup>the</sup> two men face each other. The ex-husband who always thought that money can buy anything, and the present husband who always shrinks back from complicity from malpractices. The latter, though still fearing the consequences of defying a rich and influential opponent, gathers himself together and takes courage to protect " his wife "from the man who looked upon her as a " chattel and nothing else ". The voice of the wife comes out, this time stronger than ever before : "You are stronger than him... turn him out. You are the

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(1) p. 104

(2) ibid - p. 109

master of this house ". (1)

However, it is not only the abuse of religion which brings about such complications, but also misinterpretations. Yet the author, unjustifiably, refrains from dealing with the other, and surely the most important side of the problem.

In " Al-Gallād wa Lmahkūm 'Alihī Bel I'dām" (The Hangman and man to be Hanged), the time is neither past nor present ; it is eternity. The same is true of the place; it happens nowhere in particular, though some features of the Egyptian countryside can be recognised.

The hangman and the convict are waiting at a small railway station for a train to take them to a town where the convict is to be hanged, since the village does not provide sufficient publicity for this purpose. They are, as they say, companions on a journey, which is equivilent to the journey through life.

In the first scene, the hangman is angry with the convict. The latter does not worry about his imminent death ; he has even succeeded in planting new ideas in the hangman's mind which sets him thinking for the first time in his life :

Hangman. : Curse those who threw me in your way,  
or rather those who threw you in mine.

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(1) P.

(2) Ibid . p.

I used to live in ease and happiness. This journey has come like a wind which has broken down the door of my house and penetrated into every room in it. .... Everything has been swept away....

Convict. : ( apologetically ) I'll stop talking.

Hangman : What is the use. Everything is finished. You talked and there is no way for me to forget what you have said ...You insists on being hanged, which is alone sufficient to inflame my head. ( laughing hysterical-ly) Yes, my Own Head. Nobody thought that I had a head, nor did I myself. I was mostly occupied with finding shoes to put on my feet or a cigarette to put in my mouth, but my head was left to God.

Convict. : The journey will soon be over, anyhow.

Hangman. : But what after that ?

Convict. : You will put the rope around my neck and everything will be over, like that ( snaps his fingers ).

Hangman. : ( raising his fist to strike) What will be over ?... What did you say ? The ideas you planted in my head ? Yes, ideas. (laughing with bitter irony ).



Who would have believed that I could think,  
too ? Not me anyhow.(1)

However, the train which they were waiting for is involved in an accident and never arrives. The news comes that the lives of some of the passengers are in danger, and that a chain is needed to rescue them. The hangman gives them the only one available, the one which manacles the hand of his prisoner, and tells him ' to go and help, but the convict realizing that the hangman's behaviour is not normal, refuses to go unless the hangman promises not to leave the place until he comes back :

Hangman : Go with them.

Convict. : I'll never leave you.

Hangman. : You will.

Convict. : If I do, I won't come back. I will escape.

Hangman. : You will not.

Convict. : I'm a convict and you will be punished  
for letting me go.

Hangman. : .... Go and save the people ... I'll be  
waiting for you.

Convict. : At least you come with us.

Hangman. : I don't like to.

Convict. : Do you promise that you will not leave

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(1) pp. 154; 155. (See original on page 348)

this place ?

Hangman. : You will find me when you come back.(1)

The hangman finds himself alone with a child who has been brought up by his parents to " view the strange spectacle of the man in the red robe, and who is eager to "see a man hanged". The hangman assures him that it will presently happen. He puts the rope round his own neck and says to the boy : " When the man in red comes back, tell him that I have kept my promise ".(2) He stands on a chair, fastens the other part of the rope to a branch, and asks the boy to pull the chair away.

The boy, who takes the whole scene as a game, is very eager to see the end of it. He joyfully asks the man hanging in the air : " Don't you want to come down? are you happy ? Are you happy there ?." (3).

The same symbolic approach is observable in his latest play "Dumū Iblīs" ( Tears of the Satan). The contents of the play is roughly as follows : In an unknown village, there is an intellectual girl whom the people call a " saint ". Satan sets out to corrupt her in the guise of a divine handsome young man, but he falls in love with her and repents. Unfortunately, the harm has been done, for the girl is pregnant. However, Satan confesses to her, and promises not to try and influence her child after his birth. The girl

commits suicide after having given birth to the child who is brought up by one of the family maids, in a remote village. The boy grows up to be good, and has a good influence on others, thus fulfilling the mother's plan to avenge her fall. But Satan finally consents to have the child killed to protect his power and influence over the villagers.

The play implies a dim idea about the perpetual conflict between good and evil. Good may be engendered from evil, but not in approvable way. The triumph of evil, as appears in the play, does not necessarily imply that the author is a pessimist ; it is inevitable in this particular case.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN.

Yūsuf es Sibā'ī.

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Yūsuf es Sibā'ī whose numerous novels are better known than his plays has made great contribution in the field of contemporary Egyptian drama. His plays, though unpretentious and not trying to communicate a " message ", have found considerable success on the stage. His approach differs not unpleasantly from the modern method of making one or the other figure of the play the mouthpiece of the author's convictions. The technique of al Sibā'ī is perfectly naturalistic : none of the characters ever speak out of turn, and never make an utterance which would be incongruous with his background or mentality. It is by no means rare in Egyptian literature for the author to delude himself that he has satisfied the requirements of realism by making a character speak in colloquial language or dialect. Having done that he often forgets that the ideas his illiterate or semi-literate figure expresses would be more fitting in the mouth of an uneducated man. This kind of realism has been, not very fortunately, termed " realism of style but not of expression ". Yūsuf es Sibā'ī does not fall into this trap.

Another fact of his perfectly realistic approach is the unimpeded natural progress of the conflict towards the solution. The climax never appears artificial or contrived, and the play is an actual slice of life.

" Umm Ratība" (1) is a comedy portraying the life of a middle-class family composed of a middle-aged retired teacher, 'Abdul Ṣabūr, a bachelor by choice, and his sister, Umm Ratība, the heroine of the play who, in spite of many opportunities, has remained unmarried. So have the two domestics, a maid-servant and a man-servant, though they are in love with each other. All three are afraid to marry because 'Abdul Ṣabūr does not approve of the institution of marriage. Now in late middle age, the spinster sister has found a suitor, a neighbour of suitable age, for whom she has a deep affection. Since her outlook on life is fully conservative, she cannot marry him without her brother's consent, but resents his attitude.

'Abdul Ṣabūr turns out to be the head of a spiritualist circle and believes in the possibility of communication with the spirits of the deceased. For his seance, he dons a kind of fancy dress with peaked cap and stick. He announces to his followers that he will

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(1) Umm Ratība, Al-Khangui ; Cairo; (S.d).

come back forty days after his death. In the first and second acts of the play he is still alive ; in the third he is already dead, but continue to dominate his sister as he did in his lifetime, so that she does not dare to marry her admirer. When the curtain goes up for the third time, the forty days are just over and the sister is waiting, as she has been commended, in his darkened room. She has to get his fancy dress, his wooden pattens with bells and his long stick ready for him, as he intends to come back to " tell them all what he has seen and found out in the other world " , and to " give undeniable evidence that he was right in believing in spiritualism ". Her fiance, the two servants and 'Abdul Şabūr's three disciples are in the hall waiting for " the great event " in a state of trepidation. His disciples are engaged in a conversation which is illustrative, though in a very simple way, of the spiritualist outlook. The subject is of general importance, and their utterances, though simple are not devoid of metaphysical depth.

1st. Disciple. : If Abdul Şabūr can really keep his promise and return he will be the miracle of his time.

2nd. Disciple. : Only of his time ? If he can come back in body, as he used to say



at our meetings, and tell us what he has done and seen during these forty days, it will be the greatest event since the days of Adam.

.....

1st Disciple: That's right. Nothing confuses the sons of Adam so much as their ignorance of what is on the other side. The sons of Adam who fly in the air and dive in the sea, the sons of Adam who speak in London and are heard in Cairo, who move in America and are seen in Tokio, the sons of Adam who give speech and motion to inanimate matter, the sons of Adam who understand so many things and discover so many secrets are unable to discover what concerns them most. They are unable to understand where they come from and where they go to ... why they are born and why they die. The son of Adam knows so many things on this earth except himself ... He understands many things but not his own soul .. How the soul leaves the body and what it does and where it goes.

The fiance. : You are right. But why should he want to know if it is out of his control?... He has not created it and it does not wait for his permission to go ...He has only to live and trust his maker... Whether he knows or not, he is unable to prevent its coming into his body or going away from it ... You and he, do not exert yourselves, it is a vain endeavour ... Wiser men than you have failed in that.

1st.Disciple. : One is really unable to prevent it from leaving, but one must at least know its destination, one must at least have an idea and not live in confusion. One's mind refuses to accept what one knows about the soul, and one finds oneself obliged to accept it without thinking, for if one thinks he will never believe, and yet one feels that one must believe in something. Why should destiny remain unknown ? Why should we not have the right to know where we go when we die. If our destiny is already decided and known

why is it hidden from us ? Why do we  
remain in darkness and confusion "?.  
.....

2nd Disciple: Yes, that's true. Why does this whole wide  
world , where generations follow each other,  
not know why it was created, and what of use  
people are ? Why do they misguidedly  
follow different beliefs and contradictory  
fantasies ? Generations come and go and  
no one knows where they are going to or  
where they come from, or what is the point  
of this existence in the world, and for  
whose benefit the world exists ? Those  
living in it are the most miserable in it,  
since they are threatened with death as  
soon as they are born. And they don't know  
what death is ... They are told that death  
is a transfer from a bad transitory life  
to a pleasant life. So why have they come  
into this bad transitory life ? ...The  
life in which the stronger eats the  
weaker and in which man never tastes  
peace or sees contentment .....

The fiancee. : Who knows ? Perhaps if man knew his  
unknown destiny and were certain that the



period which he passes in this world is only temporary, and that he has another long life ahead of him, he would not be greedy in this world and run after pleasure ... and want to get as much as he can out of it before he dies...(1)

Suddenly, the disciples, the fiance and the two servants listen attentively, eagerly expecting to hear the tapping of his stick, or his characteristic cough. All they hear, however, is the voice of Um Ratibah in the dark room. The uneasy situation as well as the forty days of waiting have made her a nervous wreck. At last the fiance and the servants decided to come in, and seeing Um Ratibah scolding her fiance and unconsciously adopting, in so doing, the mannerism and voice of her dead brother, they believe that she is possessed by his ghost. The comments of the servants bring her to her senses. They all realize that their fear of the dead man had no rational basis, and decided to live henceforth normal lives. Umm Ratiba and her fiance get married and so do the two servants. It is an uniformly happy end.

This play would be sufficient proof that Yusuf as Siba'i's naturalistic tendency is very successful.

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(1) pp. 188; 192 . (see original on page 349)

Umm Ratiba by no means lacks profundity. The metaphysical speculations on life and death, though lucid and easily comprehensible, are deep enough, especially if one considers that the play is a comedy and incompatible as such with the moods of depression and despair which would inevitably ensue if his touch were not quite so light.

The same qualities are observable in "Warā'as  
<sup>-1-</sup>Sitār " ( Behind the Curtain ). Although the date of the composition of this political play is not explicitly mentioned, the fact that it was dedicated to Fikrī Abāzā as the President of the Corporation of Journalists, who held office in the 1940's, permits of the inference, though only with approximation, that it was written about that time. The subject strikes us by its novelty, and by the simplicity of its approach to an internal political problem. In fact the attraction of the play lies less in the conflict itself than in the extremely skilful elaboration of minute details of characterization. The political facts it deals with give it the value of a documentary. It is very informative, and even more for the outsider than for native readers and audiences.

There is a distinct bifurcation of the conflict

into emotional and political. At the beginning of the play, the political conflict dominates to the extent that it overshadows the romantic interest almost completely, but the submerged emotional current comes to the surface by the middle of the play and fills the stage entirely towards its end.

'Azmi<sup>1</sup>, the editor of a weekly magazine, Al 'Āsifa ( The Storm ), refuses to be committed to any particular political programme. He believes that a government that has failed in the accomplishment of its set task must abdicate and make room for a more competent successor. This leads him to oppose any subsequent cabinet, since none of them can satisfy his ethical requirements. What they profess out of office is in glaring contrast with their actual policy when in office. As the magazine he edits is owned and financed by Sa'id Bey whose objectives are purely financial, and who runs the risk of losing his government subsidy if his editor stubbornly refuses to conform, he finds himself faced with the choice of being ousted from his position or renouncing his political convictions.

A man as mercenary as Sa'id bey can, of course, be a great danger to the political life of the country, as he makes it dependent on and accessible to harmful

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(1) Both this name and that of the political party Al Shu'la ( The Flame ) are meant to have a humorous effect.



influences of exploiting capitalist circles. That is why the playwright does his best to expose his harmful activities from the start. The ensuing dialogue illustrates this fact and simultaneously foreshadows future developments :

Sa'id. : I am only interested in the financial side. I leave the principles to you. Cash in on them ( if you can ). Gorge yourself full of them. I have nothing to do with principles.

'Azmi. : ... .. I have made you a man of principle against your will. You are considered, at this moment, a leader of thought, one of the forces which actuate the policy of this country. You are among the fighters who fight for right and freedom.

Sa'id. : No one is leader of thought in this country. No one actuates its policy. It moves by itself. Besides, I am a man of peace who dislikes fighting except for money. I beg you, stop attacking the Government before it retaliates. Otherwise, upon my oath, I'll transform it into a social, literary and humorous periodical, and ensure that

politics are excluded. (1)

Sa'id's idea that no Egyptian can have any influence on politics, which must be determined from above and outside, is shared by experienced politician, 'Abdul Hamid Bey, 'Azmi's friend, and the deputy chairman of the Shu'la party of the opposition which lies in wait for an opportunity to bring down the government. When this finally arrives, and 'Azmi speaks to 'Abdul Hamid of the strength of the press and public opinion, the latter contradicts him : " Governmental changes are not due to such factors ", he says, " but <sup>to</sup> trivial , unintentional incidents ". (1)

'Azmi who has welcomed the new cabinet, discovers that the change has been, not for the better, but for the worse. He turns to his attitude of protest, and the situation between him and Sa'id Bey deteriorates again.

Having depicted the corruption of the political leadership in which whoever has attained the top exerts himself desperately to remain there at all cost, the playwright shows the impression this makes on those they govern. The ensuing dialogue between 'Aliyya and Khalid, two members of Al 'Asifa' editorial staff, exemplifies the attitude of the public to political changes.

'Aliyya. : What's wrong with you ? You don't look happy.

Khalid. : Why should I ?

'Aliyya. : Because the government has fallen.

Khalid. : I am not concerned with it anyway.

'Aliyya. : I thought you would be very happy just because of its fall.

Khalid. : Not at all . . . . . Everybody in this country sees things from his own viewpoint. I mean from the viewpoint of personal interest. It is opportunism that actuates people and makes them choose this or that political party....

Khalid is a very gifted young journalist who has been writing articles and short stories for some time, but has hitherto failed to find an editor willing to accept them. They are usually rejected on the ground that they are too difficult, and that the public dislikes depth in journalism. 'Azmi his own chief, is no exception in this respect. So far the only article Khalid has had published in the magazine he works for is a report on misadventure which has befallen a member of high society who, involved in an illicit affair with a film actress, has had to escape through the window in very scant attire before the wrath of his wife.



However, the publication of his report is of no benefit to Khalid, for the unfortunate victim is none other than Sa'id bey, the owner of the magazine, and the article has to be withdrawn. Khalid's colleague on the paper, 'Aliyya, a girl of aristocratic descent, thinks that if she signs Khalid's articles with her own name she might persuade 'Azmi, who is in love with her and would like to marry her, to find room for them in Al 'Asifah. Khalid is at first reluctant, but agrees for emotional reasons - he is also in love with 'Aliyya - and his articles are published.

Meanwhile the leader of the Shu'la party has been trying to form a government. He has certain difficulties in finding a minister of finance. Suggestions come in from all sides, and the future premier's wife proposes a "doctor" of whose abilities she has a very high opinion. The doctor's name is Za'tar. Her husband who confuses him with another Za'tar, asks the prospective member of the cabinet to visit him. In the ensuing confusion very effective <sup>e</sup>us is made of the fact that an Egyptian will apply the word "al gama'a" to the people in general as well as to his wife, and the verb "saqata" may mean the "fall of the government" as well as "miscarriage". The prime minister finds that the man who has come in answer to his summons, believing that

the premier's wife has had a miscarriage, is not an economist but an obstetrician. Finally the cabinet is formed, the list of appointments is signed by the king, when a new misfortune befalls the prime minister : the economist Za'tar dies suddenly. To avoid having to submit a new list of ministers to the king, the prime minister, " trusting in God", accepts the idea of substituting the obstetrician Za'tar for his deceased namesake. However, the latter cannot cope with the requirements of the ministry of finance, and the government falls again. The brief rule of the opposition convinces 'Azmi that it has been even worse than that of the right wing government he was so violently attacking. The call for agrarian reforms to be introduced without delay, and the insistence on a minimum wage for the farm labourers was only a party manoeuvre, designed to supplant the government in power. Once they succeed, the idealistic policies, which were only the means to an aim, can be discarded, and 'Azmi realizes that he fought for a mirage.

However, a new cabinet is formed, and this time the choice of the new prime minister falls on 'Azmi the idealist revolutionary who accepts the office and surrenders the editorship of Al 'Asifa to Khalid. It is not said whether 'Azmi becomes a better minister than

his predecessors, though his good will is not to be questioned, but there is a presentiment of failure. Amīn an old member of the editorial staff, makes the ominous remark : " You ( i.e. 'Azmi) have caused the fall of so many governments. Do you think you will not do it to your own ?". Thus the play far from giving an answer to the question, ends in a quibble.



## Chapter Twelve.

## Drama and Political Unrest.

The series of revolutions which Egypt underwent in modern history were essentially political. This was the case with the movement headed by 'Umar Makram who led the opposition against Muhammad 'Alī Pasha, and also with the 'Urabi and 1919 revolutions. This is by no means surprising if one bears in mind how long Egypt remained under occupation or semi-occupation.

However, it is important to state that these revolutions arose out of the middle class's political consciousness, which always identified itself with the aspirations of the Egyptian people. The 'Urabi movement was deeply influenced by Jamāl ed Dīn el Afghānī, whose main aim was to urge the sovereign to accept a fair participation by the people in the government of the country through parliamentary representation. The committee of three hundred, which was formed with the task of promoting this was recruited from educated Egyptians, mostly progressive minded army officers, businessmen and libertarians such as Muhammad 'Abduh, Fathī Zaghlūl, Al Bārūdī and 'Abdullah al Nadīm. But one can hardly imagine that the introduction of a constitutional government was the only objective of the committee, since its guide and leader, Jamāl ed

Din, had always laid great stress on social reform, based on a reform of religion.

This combination between political and social consciousness is also visible in the 1919 Revolution. It was the general trend of thought at the time that no social reforms could be initiated before the country achieved complete political independence. Opposed to this trend was the attitude of Lutfi es Sayyed, known as the teacher of the Generation, who emphasized the necessity of self-criticism and eradication of certain national defects which stood in the way of reform. This attitude which proved most fruitful in the literary domain, is more visible in the dramatic product of the three decades between the declaration of independence, in 1922, and the fall of the royalist regime. The attitude of self-criticism was adopted with alacrity by Tawfiq al Hakin, Mahmud Taymur and other young writers, ultimately leading, or rather encouraging the drama of social criticism. By 1952, the preoccupation with politics and with social reforms combined, and the link between the political and social aspects of the national life became stronger than ever before. The thirty barren years of nominal political independence brought into existence two different attitudes : the one responding to the call to " Look back in Anger",

which was adopted for several years by revolutionary young dramatists, and the other watching the new process of life with great cautiousness, which was adopted by writers who had lived through the bitter experiences of the past, and preferred to wait before making a judgment.

The plays to be discussed in the following pages are selected to represent the first attitude, reflecting general feelings, fears and desires, in a natural reaction to the ugliness of the past, and implying the wish to see a better world materialize. The second attitude is exemplified by Tawfiq al Hakin's Al Sultan ul H<sup>1</sup>air.

It is important to state that the direct political approach has, as it was expected, been fading away, since the emphasis has been shifted to the present urgent national and human causes, as will be soon observable in Sa'ed D<sup>1</sup>in Wahba's Mosquito Bridge, and Yūsuf Idrīs's The Critical Moment.

As to the origin of the direct political approach, it may be suggested that the playwrights respond, though strongly, to the feelings of the masses, or rather to the night-mare-like visions of the past. They also want to establish communion with their audience, and at the same time create or help to



emphasize the idea that the system which resulted in and allowed such despotism, injustice and tyranny must be given no opportunity to survive.

From this standpoint, it is possible to gain an insight into the new revolutionary structure. There is the fact that all these plays deal with situations in pre-revolutionary society and the accompanying social evils. They are a deliberate attempt, following the tradition of European liberal bourgeois novelists, to expose the tyranny, corruption and decadence of the upper classes. But in the case of Egyptian dramatists, the whole régime from its head, the king, to its tail, the feudalists and political leaders, is subject of a fierce attack.

However, none of the playwrights selected to represent this political trend is dull. Two different main approaches are visible : that exemplified by Lutfi al Khulī's *Café Royal*, and Yūsuf Idrīs's *the Critical Moment*, the second by Mahmūd es Sa'danī's *Panaiotti' District*, and Sa'd ed Dīn Wahba's "*Al Mahrūsa*" and *the Guard's Van*. The value of the plays in both categories, as social documents, is undeniable.

1 - Luṭfī el Khūlī.

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Luṭfī el Khūlī's Qahwat ul Mulūk ( The Café Royal ) is a political play, which portrays a number of simple people in a given situation. Its real value lies in its local types, its characterization and its naturalistic dialogue. The playwright's verbal rhetoric flows from a naturalistic, colloquial language which is characteristic of people of their class in the ordinary circumstances of actual life.

Badawī, an Egyptian Jean Valjean who has been convicted for fraud, leaves his prison full of hatred and bitterness. In order to survive, he resorts to an unusual subterfuge. He goes to funerals of rich and prominent people whose protégé he pretends to be. He says that the deceased use to help him secretly with gifts of money to support a fictitious family consisting of wife and three children, and mostly succeeds in securing the help of the heirs. Badawī lives in a room in an old house which is the property of the Mu'allim Shuhda, the owner of Qahwat ul Mulūk.

In this typically Egyptian milieu, people become entangled in a conflict which is also typical of its kind. Poverty does not prevent Badawī from forming a

sentimental attachment to Umm Ibrahim, whom Shuhda intends to marry. This leads to a friction between Badawī and Shuhda who, having failed to forcing his tennant by the law, insists on settling the matter in his own arbitrary way.

The café is the habitual haunt of a number of revolutionary workers and members of their Trade Union, who also hold their meetings there without the knowledge of the proprietor. Badawī though completely disinterested in the matter becomes, nevertheless, involved as he is always ready to oblige the illiterate workers by writing their leaflets and applications for financial reward. A policeman, who was formerly the warder of Badawī's prison and also a friend of his, finds the papers in his possession and takes him to the police station where he is put under detention. In prison, Badawī meets not only Shuhda who is arrested for having harboured the "conspirators", but also workers, students and other political prisoners. As a result of the discussion among the educated prisoners, Badawī and Shuhda find out that they have only one enemy who is their common enemy, namely the king. Badawī also becomes convinced that he cannot go on living by fraud, but has to do "real work". His first spell in prison filled him with bitterness and despair, but this fortnight of



detention leads to his rehabilitation : he forms friend-ship with all the people he used to look upon as enemies.

In tune with the trend of the times, Shuhda decided to change the name of his cafe to "The Workers' Cafe". The play comes to a close with a worker coming in for a cup of tea, and the waiter serving with the joyful exclamation : " Tea for His Majesty the Worker!"<sup>(1)</sup>

The plot of the play is very simple : a man is involved in a situation that sets him thinking and hence changes his life. However, there is more than one character who ~~proffers~~ new ideas that give rise to critical activity of a sort that challenges one to judge, though none of these ideas can really create an antagonism between the playwright and his audience. It is the consistently vivid dialogue, sustained by the pure Egyptian types, which gives <sup>the</sup> substance to simple but basically sound plot. It is a continuous comment on many themes of life which the plot is far from broaching. Some of these comments are, however, direct and flat, a mistake that can hardly be justified by the intellectual standards of the audience the play seeks to contact and satisfy.

The following quotation shows the way in which

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(1) p. 144

the playwright takes up a simple, innocent remark, and makes it the point of departure for a scathing satirical allusion. The conversation takes place between Badawī and 'Afifī, the secret policeman who comes to the café to spy out the leaders of the Trade Union :

- 'A. : They pay five pounds for each head, and you can figure it out yourself what five pounds mean.
- B. : Five pounds ?
- 'A. : And there are seasons when heads are in great demand ; one thousand, two thousand three thousand... It depends on one's cleverness. You can get forty or fifty pounds out of it. So you can buy sugar, meat and rice, and live like a king....
- B. : Suppose there are no heads ?
- 'A. : No heads, you say ? ... there is nothing more common in this country. You can hardly find a man who is not disgusted with Him or Them, and this is what is sought after.
- B. : Sought after ?
- 'A. : Yes. You for instance : what do you think of Him.
- B. : Lousy

- 'A. : And Then ?.
- B. : Rotten.
- 'A. : Very well, you are a candidate for a head. Someone will get five pounds for you.
- B. : Good gracious. It is injustice.
- 'A. : Do you call it injustice ? What about the days when I had nothing to buy food with for my children. Wasn't that injustice ? And when my father went blind because he couldn't afford the price of a bottle of eye-drops. Wasn't that injustice ? And what about you yourself when you were a cashier ? They sacked you from the office, didn't they ? They also sentenced you to two years because you had BORROWED two pounds out of the till to pay the rent. Wasn't that injustice ? They have been unjust to me, and now I am trying to be unjust to them. I will go on squeezing their necks until I choke the life out of them one after the other. Yet you come and talk to me about injustice.



B... : No, Sergeant 'Afifi. Your injustice will never  
 cure their's. You are hunting poor oppressed  
 people like me and yourself, and offering  
 them to Him and Then ... Really I am very  
 sorry for you. A head-seller. And for whom?  
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 The ki...(hesitates and points to the palace).

The sergeant's "they pay five pounds for each head" is a prelude to jeering criticism about a government which treats the people as if they were cattle, for it is exactly what the colloquial words imply. The statement "There is nothing more common nowadays" alludes to the spectacle of tyranny, and to the common feelings against the king. Badawi's little speech about the "head sales" enhances the effect of the pitiful situation in which a man earns his livelihood by "hunting poor people" like himself.

The playwright is also aware of the reaction of his characters to the events of the play. Badawi's metonymy becomes manifest immediately after his release from detention. He tells his partner in the confidence trick that their "job as tear mongers is nothing but daylight robbery". They are "stealing the hearts of good people and paying them in counterfeit coinage". This change in Badawi's character does not lack promises.

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(1) pp. 50 ; 53 (2) p. 131.  
 see original on page 351, 352.

"My fellows in prison" he argues "have made me forget all the hatred I felt before ... All of them are poor and simple like me."(1)

Badawi's partner, who has not passed through the same experience, still believes that everything has been pre-ordained and that it is no use fighting against one's fate. His blind faith in predestination makes him assume that "man is fated to play a certain role in life, and to occupy a certain place in society", and that " God gives to everyone according to his needs only". Badawi rejects this as wrong and unfounded. " They want us to believe in all this, so that our hands may be tied with invisible ropes".(2)

One might end by referring to the fact that there are indications that the playwright was attempting something for the three-dimensional stage, but abandoned the idea and contented himself with establishing a close contact between the two milieux; the slums of the lanes and the cafe. That is done by numerous references and allusions in the cafe to what is going on outside.

11 - Maḥmūd es Sa'dani.

Maḥmūd es Sa'dani's 'Ezbit Panaiotti (Panaiotti ' village ) is an attempt to reveal the extent of duplicity of certain types of Egyptian politicians; how they <sup>-3-</sup> ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds. It takes

(1) p. 130 (2) p.132.

(3) Published by Al- Dar al- Qawmiyya; (s. s)

as its theme the story of the fida'iyyīn's (commandos) resistance, since this theme, being one of bloodshed and violence, heightens the excitement of a political play like this.

Hasanain, a building contractor and member of parliament, has invested almost his wealth in modernizing a village near the Suez Canal, in order to lease it for accommodation to British troops. He also runs another profitable business on the side, by employing a band of thieves to pilfer from British camps. His son a student at the university, joins the fedaweyīn and asks him, as the representative of the constituency, to give support. Being convinced that he will suffer a financial disaster if the British leave Egypt, Hasanain pretends to give his full support, but decides to help to accomplish their downfall. The playwright stresses two-faced policy, since Hasanain is meant to be an example of the politicians he attacks.

Seeking for an avenger, the playwright chooses Hasanain's own brother, a broken man who has had a long record of patriotism for which he had spent fifteen years in prison. The brother is also typical of those who fought a lost battle in the nineteen twenties, and came out of it full of bitterness and despair.

The idle, drunkard brother is, in spite of every



thing, an idealist and honest man. He decides to foil Hasanain's plan, although he knows that he will lose him as his provider. Meanwhile, the son who discovers the plan, cuts himself off from his father, and goes with his fellows, the commandos, to camp in the village. This, however, arouses Hasanain's fears, and he persuades an officer friend to arrange for them to be driven out. The plan is that a number of British soldiers will skirmish with the fedayyin but this turns, unexpectedly, into a fierce battle between the two sides, and the village is destroyed.

The play closes with Hasanain, already abandoned by all his family, watching the village, his investment, turning to ashes.

In dealing with this kind/<sup>of</sup> purely political plays, one needs to be reminded of the self-limiting objectives of such plays, which seek to reach a large audience composed of people who are, essentially, simple-minded. It is an undoubted fact that at certain periods, a political theme may create a kind of communion between stage and audience, though it will always be preferable for such a communion to be created by the drama itself. It is another inescapable fact that it has been the major preoccupation of Egyptian writers since the fall of the old regime in 1952, to find in the theatre a

collective expression of public feeling and thinking, to gain a following among the masses, in brief, to awaken an enthusiasm that may give some content to the vague conception of "drama communion".

One must add that the favourite of the majority of the Egyptian audiences was, at the time, plays satirizing the old régime and magnifying the public "struggle" in the pre-revolutionary era. They want to see their own life mirrored on the stage ; they may even allow their foibles to be satirically criticised, and will never be angry at listening to valid comments on their common behaviour. But a play which portrays or magnifies the popular struggle against the evils of the fallen régime will satisfy the spectators who want to see themselves as participants in that struggle.

Although one may agree that a play which aims at mass-satisfaction is not always or necessarily commercial, the enthusiasm created only by this public feeling resembles that created by the aggressive quips of the comedies of the kind that were launched against aristocratic types before 1952.

Then one comes to the question : where can one find in such plays the society with which contact is to be established ? It is a fact that when a play turns political, the playwright, always, finds his vantage point

for attack in the fallen system. This is the case with "Panaiotti's village" which has, undoubtedly, a short-sighted aim. The Café Royal is the opposite of this. It generalizes the playwright's attitude towards the maladies of society he actually addresses. On the positive side, it is an assault on the fallen régime and a defence of the new, though unmentioned, régime, and on the negative side an optimistic criticism of traditions and ways of life which are still in action.

In every play, one usually expects the playwright to achieve a "work of art" in which a theme and a plot are dramatized, a task which is realized in these political plays, but instead of seeking for and finding a vantage point for satire in post-revolutionary society, playwrights often turn to pre-revolutionary times, and attempt to resuscitate some characters that lived in the past under certain circumstances, in the hope, presumably, that the audience will stumble by themselves upon the contrast between the two modes of life. This is also commendable in transitional stages, provided it is not direct and explicit.

"look back in anger" is the turning point in post-revolutionary political plays. Yūsuf Idri's *The Critical Moment* represents a new and very fruitful tendency in political drama, and will, therefore, be the subject of detailed analysis in the following pages.



## 111 - Sa'd ed Dīn Wahba

Sa'd ed Dīn Wahba, a brilliant short-story writer and revolutionary journalist who was publishing a literary magazine at a difficult time when other literary magazines such as Al Risāla, Al Thaqāfa and Al Katib died, joined the ranks of dramatists in the early nineteen sixties. Both his political and symbolic plays have gained and are still gaining an immense success on the stage.

i - His play "Al-Mahrūsa"<sup>(1)</sup> is a sharp commentary which pinpoints aspects of the feudal system and attacks the king as its head and main representative. In Al-Mahrūsa, which is one of the king's estates, the playwright introduces the audience to aspects of despotism, injustice and corruption which were<sup>the</sup>/accepted law in all feudal manors, but at the same time he gives a stirring idea of the revolutionary ferment in the hearts of the masses, represented by peasants and educated people including even officers of the police force.

The play makes also a powerful impact through the plot which brings into relief the ruthless methods of the security forces. The king's retainers on the estate, who wish to keep the peasants in a state of subjection, plan to get rid of a peasant who shows too much concern for human rights. This can be accomplished most easily

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(1) Al-Dār al-Qawmiyya; s.d.

by using the law of the time. Accordingly the police, who know their duty in such cases, try to coerce him into confessing the crime of murder which he had not committed. They finally secure his confession by threatening to send him and his family to "Tūr", a penal settlement for men suspected of menacing the law, but against whom nothing can be proved.

Meanwhile, in the village, another "suspect" has also been interrogated and forced to confess to the murder. A subtle contrast is brought out here. The inspector is devoting all his attention to the task of compelling the peasant from the royal estate to confess, assuring him that he will have a more comfortable life in prison, and swearing on his honour that he will not be hanged. While his mind is thus preoccupied, a policeman enters with the confession obtained from the other suspect in the village. The inspector signs it without knowing that he is presenting the Public Prosecutor with two separate confessions to the same crime. This prevailing commentary on the justice of the time brings the play to an end.

ii - The other political play "Al Sibinsa" (The Guard's Van) is a subtle attempt to expose life under the former royal régime. The playwright applies, however, a novel technique by introducing an inconclusive ending,

leaving the audience in a state of expectation of another scene. The plot reveals many harsh facts of life ; a girl is forced by poverty to sell her body to the manager of an estate ; another young woman goes to the police station to secure her husband's release and, through the police taking advantage of her, loses her husband ; a policeman, whose conscience prevents him from obeying tyrannical orders, is sent to the lunatic asylum, though he is perfectly sane. If viewed more carefully, Al Sibinsa marks an evolution in the playwright's attitude and technique. It also contains a promising symbolism which is brought into fulfilment in his latest play, The Mosquito Bridge.

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iii - Kubrī al Nāmūs. (The Mosquito Bridge).

This play by Sa'd ed Dīn Wahbah is outwardly also a drama of political message with the political background of the pre-revolutionary era. Politics is however not its main concern. It reaches deep into the very roots of the human soul and existence, laying bare the depths of the subconscious thoughts, preoccupation and yearnings of a number of characters who assemble beside and on the bridge to keep tryst. The bridge itself, which spans a rivulet dividing a built-up urban area from the desert is an imaginary one. The two boroughs, however, are real, and so is the custom



to gather for the purpose of social intercourse at stations, bridges and on market-places which prevails all over Egypt. This bridge provides the only apparent link between a number of people of different character and from different backgrounds; the only point of similarity between whom is that they are waiting for something to materialize. Thus the bridge acquires a symbolic significance, though it is not quite clear what it is intended to symbolise. Joining as it does actually existent, known localities with the unknown, unexplored desert, the bridge may stand for the link between the known and the unknown, or the transition between the present and the future. Or else it may join - or divide - this world from the next, the temporal from the spiritual. The play is reminiscent of Samuel Becket's "Waiting for Godot" in that one sees people waiting hopelessly for something and no one knows definitely why they are waiting and what they are really waiting for, though one occasionally finds that every one of them believes strongly in what he is waiting for. The play begins, continues and ends in suspension. There is little action, and nothing is actually crowned with success, and so nothing of the expectations really materialize.

Typical in this respect are the two young men who came to the deserted area behind the bridge for target

practice with the ulterior aim of assassinating a politician whom they consider a traitor to the national cause. Their attempt misfires, for the victim is not the politician, but a poor innocent man who finds himself accidentally on the scene. The would-be avenger of revolutionary ideals is so shaken by this error and so plagued by pangs of conscience that he surrenders to the authorities, thus shattering the dreams of another person in the play, a young girl who has a modest little coffee-stall near the bridge, and whose longings centre round the figure of an ideal lover. An attractive girl, she repulses the advances of several men because she wants to keep her chastity intact for one superlatively worthy of her devotion. This imaginary lover is so real to her that she often believes herself, in her day-dreams, already married to him or even pregnant looking forward to bearing a son who will have all the noble features of his ideal father. It is no wonder that when a charming young man appears on the scene she believes that her ideal lover has materialized though he never confesses his love to her. She is a kind of accomplice in his deed, for she keeps his gun in trust for him and believes in the loftiness of his motives. The cruel disappointment at his disappearance is also, in a way, typical for the atmosphere of failure which

permeates the play. The failure is still more complete in the case of the old woman who has lost her son in a political demonstration in which a number of University students were killed by being thrown from a bridge into the water. She holds long conversations with her dead son, actually believing that she sees his face in the water and hears his voice answering her, and expects him to return to her at any moment. Failure also threatens another character, who is really a darwish of the type called "magdhūb", i.e. a cross between a pious man and a madman. He is under the spell of a story that a man used to pray to the saint, Es Sayyid el Badawi, to show himself to him, but died immediately when his wish was fulfilled. He is also waiting for such a miracle, and it is obvious that the darwish is really waiting for death. As not otherwise expected in this play of failure, the darwish stays alive.



Yūsuf Idrīs.

A Tendency Towards Self-criticism.

In 1958, Yūsuf Idrīs, well known to readers of modern Egyptian literature as a brilliant short-story writer, entered like many other Egyptian novelists, the field of drama which proved to have tremendous potentialities. However, he is not concerned with the achievements of the past or problems of the pro-revolutionary society, but with social defects which still exist in post-revolutionary community. His first play, "Al Lahzāh al Harigah" is more indicative of this attitude. Besides, it shows his sound understanding of the main tendencies in drama, and more especially the new trend of "socialist realism,". Judging by the general standard of the literary output of the Suez War, a great deal of which is influenced by immediate experiences to the extent that reduces a work of art to mere propaganda, this play may be regarded as a valid social document.

The repeated accusation that Yusuf Idris believed in communism as a solution of the social problems facing the pre-revolutionary Egyptian society makes it advisable to begin by discussing it. The reason for this lies in the fact that any work of literature, necessarily, implies the ideology of **its** writer, though it has been already maintained that this study does not deal with

ideological criticism.

Such allegations against political opponents are a common occurrence in Egypt under the old regime, and unless they remained hanging over the head of the writer for some years after the 1952 Revolution, any attempt to discussion of them will be unnecessary.

As far as his literary works are concerned, no convincing evidence has been found that he preached any communist idea. But his approach resembles, to a great extent, that distinguishing "Critical Realism".

His first play "Al Lahzat ul Harijah" ( The Critical Moment ), written about the Suez War, deals with a very new situation in post-revolutionary society. It portrays the reaction of a middle class family towards this war, and uses it as a prelude to an accurate and a valid analysis of the society in question.

The audience is introduced all at once to the passive and positive sides of their life. There is Haj Nassar, the father, who honestly responds to fears and feelings which he still preserves from monarchial Egypt; the son, Sa'd, who struggles to drop the negative factors he has inherited, but finds himself unable to get rid of them ; the soldier, George, who does not believe in war but is forced to fight and kill. There is also a number of simple people, but never puppets, whose

reaction to life is honest and sincere.

In the more common play of this kind, the father often bids his son a warm farewell, and welcomes his going to defend his country. The son usually goes, fights bravely and is wounded or killed. In many cases, he loses an arm or leg, and is brought to the hospital where his fiancée is working as a volunteer nurse and the play comes to its happy ending with the proud fiancée welcoming the hero, not the man disfigured by war.

But in this play, the whole situation is completely different. Haj Nassar insists on preventing his son from going to war. He locks him in, and keeps the key in his pocket. He had lived his life, as a child and young man, deprived of the legal rights of human beings, and is not prepared under any circumstance to let his son be killed in a battle which is no concern of theirs.

Father. : For whom do you want to fight ?

Son. : For ourselves. For you, for my brother, Mus'ad and my mother, for our neighbours our relatives and our friends, for the people of our town, for all Egyptians...

Father. : What are you talking about ? Who are those you call neighbours ...? No one felt hungry when I was starving. None seemed willing to give me any of his



clothes when I was nearly naked. Do you ask me to suffer hunger alone and fight for them after all ? What is Egypt ? It is not Egypt that brought you up. Egypt has not helped you to go to school. No one in Egypt suffered for you but me.(1)

The conflict is not between two generations, but between two different ways of thinking. Hāj Naṣṣār is still judging the present by the past, so he believes that "those to whom Egypt belongs must defend it ".But Sa'd the son, is inclined to believe that the country belongs to them all, and that every one must defend it. In his heart, he strongly feels the fears of his upbringing, and wishes to find out whether or not he will really be able to bear the responsibilities of a citizen in a free country. "Perhaps I am really going to defend the country" he tells his father, "But to tell the truth.. I have another reason. I wish to know ... how I am going to behave at the critical moment"(2)

In the first scene, Hāj Naṣṣār is seen enjoying a happy family life, typical of that of any Egyptian middle class family. His elder son , Mus'ad, who is looking after his father's small carpentry firm, lives with his wife . in the family residence, so

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(1) p. 75                      (2) p. 76  
see original on page 353.

do Sa'd, a university student, the mother and two daughters. Suddenly, the family daily life is upset by the consequences of the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The whole country must be prepared for the expected military action. But Hāj Nassār insists that "one will never be attacked unless he is the first to attack", and strongly prevented his son, Sa'd, from joining the National Guard. The military mobilization is, for him, "nothing but a mere bluster": "The British soldiers attack only those who attack them".

Sa'd, who has begun his military training without his father's consent, faces "his critical moment" when he is asked to join the commandos in Port Said. He finds himself faced with the choice of two things; the fear caused by the negative factors he has inherited, on the one hand, and the scandal of being a coward in the eyes of his fellows, on the other. He tries faithfully to overcome his fear : "Do you know what is the problem, Sa'd ?, he says to himself, "You are<sup>not</sup> afraid. The story (of your fear) means only one thing, that is you are afraid that your fears will overcome you at the moment of serious action. Exactly : you fear your fear. I actually feel it now. I feel as if the sky were covered with clouds of fear, and that it is going to rain. Never mind .. I must resist all (sorts of fears).

Where has this feeling come from ? All right .. A mouse does not fear a mouse, and a lion does not fear a lion. I will never fear. It is a foolish weakness that I must get rid of. Long live Egypt, boy.(57). However, the father settles his problem, though temporarily, when he locks him in his own room. Sa'd who knows that the room is not properly locked, contents himself with empty shouts and protests, a mere attempt at self-deception.

The critical moment overshadows the whole country when the war breaks out, but Hāj Nassār is still unable to understand the logic of events, and holds fast to his belief. Even when the town is bombed and the house next to his is destroyed, he buries himself in deep prayer in order to forget, or rather to escape the whole situation.

The events of the play develop quickly in the second act, and the audience is introduced to George and Arthur, two British soldiers, who have just received an order to attack Haj Nassār's house in search of members of the National Guard. They have fifteen minutes before the zero hour starts, a very short time for George, the humanitarian intellectual, to reconsider his ideas about war, courage and cowardice, love and hatred, friendship and enmity. The ensuing dialogue between two soldiers is worth quoting :



G. : You'll go there, Arthur ( pointing to the oppo-  
-site flat).

A. : As you wish .. would you like to change with me?  
You know I'm lucky in such occasions.

G. : Lucky ?

A. : My luck is always wonderful. In such places, and  
in every country we fought before, I never  
got but a handful of mice.

G. : I hope no mouse will get you this time.

A. : This is the talk of a man who is afraid for his  
life, George. Do you feel afraid ?

G. : Me ? I don't know.

A. : I myself know. I am ready to kill one thousand  
of these Egyptians before being killed by one of  
them.

G. : My problem is that I am afraid that that one will  
kill me.

A. : Are you serious. This is cowardice, you know it  
is.

G. : Why don't you call it love of life, Arthur ?

... ..

A. : Do you prefer to go back a coward ?

G. : To tell you the truth, I prefer to go back, that  
is all.

... ..

A. : ... You know war is war. If you do not kill your enemy, he will kill you. Do you know that ? ... In a few minutes either you or your enemy will be dead, and you are the one who has to choose who will be the killed man and who will be the killer.

... ..

G. : I don't know why the one must kill the other. Isn't it a foolish comedy ?

A. : But this is the law of life..Either you or him.

G. : Who forged such a foolish thing and attributed it to life ?

A. : You idiot, do you think it now a convenient time to reconsider what is real and what is false. Think as you like and you'll find yourself a dead body even before you come to an answer. In this moment you have no choice at all.. either  
(1)  
kill or be killed. (114)

At the zero hour, George forces the door open and finds Hāj Naṣṣār standing in the hall in prayer. Naturally he is unable to see in him the simple man he really is, but the "enemy" he has to kill. The danger is over now, and it is easy for George to see the other side of the problem. He first tries to find an excuse for shooting the man : "Surely he wanted to kill me first. I was

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(1) See original on page 353.

defending myself. How could I know that he was unarmed?" But this attempt at self-delusion fails when Sawsan, Nassar's little daughter, comes into the hall. The girl is of the same age and has the same features as Shirley, George's little daughter whom he has left behind in Scotland. This together with the word "Papa " which Sawsan utters in the same childish way as Shirley, draws George strongly back to the real situation :

George : Good God ! She is my daughter. But why does she speak this barbarous language ? She is Shirley.

Sawsan : (looking at him but addressing her father)  
Papa... Papa .

George : Devils in Hell ! She is my daughter.No.No, impossible. She is his daughter. Listen.Are you my daughter or his. Speak .. Tell me or I'll fire.

Sawsan : ( who is pleased by the gun in his hand )  
Give<sup>it</sup> to me ( tries to take the gun ).

George : ( pushing her strongly away ) No, you are his daughter. You're an enemy. Whoever tries to disarm me is my enemy. Up with your hands. All of you.

Sawsan, who hurries to hide herself in the bosom of her father, discovers the blood. She addresses George



in an admonishing way :

Sawsan . Look, you've injured "papa". Why have you injured him ? Why have you injured "papa" ?

George : My Lord ! My head will burst. I think I understand what she says ... Their language is no longer barbarous... It seems as if Shirley were speaking to me.

Sawsan : (loudly) Why have you injured him ? Tell me. Why ?

George : (out of breath) Exactly. I know what you're talking about. You blame me ..You persecute me (Loudly). Devils in hell ! I'm going mad. If I were in the presence of God at the Day of Judgement, I wouldn't be so ashamed of myself. Forgive me, little girl. I was defending myself. (120 - 121 )

By this last sentence, the playwright demonstrates that George is no longer able to deceive himself ; his conscience is already awakened and it will be very difficult to go on any further in self-deception. When his officer comes to find out what has happened to him, he finds that the shock was stronger than he could bear :

George. : Arrest me, Sir,

Officer. : Arrest you ? Why ?

George. : I have committed a crime.

- Officer : At the time being, no crime is considered except neglect of orders.
- G. : My crime, Sir, is carrying out orders.
- O. : Then, no offence has been committed. What have you done ?
- G. : I've killed a father.
- O. : He is an enemy.
- G. : He is a father.
- O. : The father of whom ?
- G. : Shirley's father.
- O. : Who is Shirley ?
- G. : My daughter.
- O. : ( with a faint smile ) That means you've killed yourself.
- G. : Yes, Sir. It is exactly what happened. I  
(1)  
have killed myself.

This explains the playwright's ideology and humanitarian attitude. Sa'd, who was hiding under the bed all the time, comes out and sees his father bleeding. Haj Naṣṣār moves his head and opens his eyes :

Naṣṣār : Sa'd.?

Sa'd : The door was open ... What has happened to you, father ?

Naṣṣār : An Englishman was joking with me but rather heavily, Sa'd.

Sa'd ; Has he injured you, father ?

Nassār : No. He has killed me.

Sa'd : How did he kill you, father. The door ...

Nassār : ( interrupting him ) Never mind. I've made a fool of you. The door wasn't properly locked. Sawsan was able to open it herself, but you imagined that I had locked you in.

Sa'd. : Perhaps I myself was aware of this, father.

Nassār : I don't believe it, son.

.... .

Sa'd : It is me who killed you, father.

Nassār : He who killed me is an Englishman.

Sa'd : I was able to open the door.

Nassār : If you did you would get yourself killed as well as me.

Sa'd : I've bought my life with fear...

Nassār : Never mind ... Why not? He who brought you up felt deadly afraid of you, that is why you've grown up afraid for yourself. Damn the father who brought you up. Damn my own father too.

Sa'd : You always consider yourself responsible for everything, even my own fear.

Nassār : Don't worry, Sa'd. I am finished, and it is all right for me. But do you know that I would like my days back again. I would like



to live another life, different from the life which I lived before. To live without fear. To live without enduring any insult, and bring you up again without being afraid for you. I swear that he who accepts an obsequious life deserves fairly not to stay alive at all. (1)  
( 126-27).

The father's death pushes Sa'd to the other extreme. He is no longer unable to overcome fear: "Was it necessary to die, dear father, in order to be able to overcome my fear"? ( 137).

In the play, the interaction between the characters and life is obvious. This shows the playwright's sound understanding of the new realism. Defects and foibles are exposed, but as accidental, not essential malaises, which reflects the playwright's ideology. Although humanitarian, as appears in his sympathy with the natural goodness of the human race, the playwright is by no means apologetic.

From the dialectical viewpoint, a Critical Moment, by putting man to the test of fire and water, helps him to discover himself and to reconsider his ideology to find out what is right and what is wrong. This idea is emphasized again and again all through the play. The passive attitude of Hāj Nassār is inevitable. Because

of the exploitation of the country's resources to serve the interests of a small group of feudalists he became convinced that "Egypt does not belong to him", but belongs to those who dominate everything and have left him "hungry and ignorant like a real ox".

The character's actions and reactions are naturalistic enough, and the play in general is a sharp attack on the "fatal lies", and a very subtle attempt to expose the contradiction between theory and practice. The play also comprises a sound analysis of many cases: ideology is not something given, but something to be discussed and worked out, as is obvious in the case of Hāj Nassār and George ; the failure of an individual is not always or necessarily a defeat. It can be a further step towards the victory of the human soul, as in the case of the soldier George.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN.

Rashād Rushdī

Reaction of the Political Approach.

(1)

Rashad Rushdi's first full-length play "Al Farāsha" (The Butterfly), first performed on the stage of Cairo Opera House in February 1959 by the Free Theatre, was received with acclamation by most critics, not so much, due to the prominent position and reputation of its author, who is Head of the English Literature Department at Cairo University, but also to its unquestionable merit. The Butterfly as well as Rashad Rushdi's other plays presented at the time a promising, yet fruitful, reaction against the then overwhelming political drama.

Al Farāsha, the name given to Samīha by her husband Ramzi, is the youngest daughter of a Pasha. She continues to live with her husband, a middle-class writer of progressive tendencies, in her father's villa, which is also shared by Samīha's widowed mother and Nahid, her divorced sister. There is also a servant who plays the part of an observer in a very curious way: whenever any immoral thing happens of any member of the pasha's family

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(1) Al Farāsha ; Al-Anglo al -Misriyya 1st ed.1960.

(2) Rashād Rushdī, who now is also editor-in-chief of the "Theatre", started his literary career by writing one-act plays and short-stories. He got the degree of Ph.D. in Leeds University. He also attended a course in drama at Stratford-upon-Avon.



the servant addresses the portrait of the pasha over the mantelpiece as if in order to inform the audience that what is going on is similar and the consequence of what was going on during the pasha's life.

In the first act of the play, the couple is introduced to the audience. He is enthusiastically writing a short-story which is supposed to be published in a newspaper the following day, and she a pampered woman who is fully aware of her beauty and charm, is convinced that he is wasting his time. She does not believe in her husband's literary mission, and thinks that he would do better if he took a remunerative post as manager of a firm. They are obviously in love with each other, but it is easy to see that they disagree at least in one vital point, namely in their basic outlook on life. In spite of her ostensible admiration for her husband, she feels restless at home longing for the noisy whirl of society to which she was used to before her marriage, while he is completely absorbed in his work, and unable to satisfy his wife who is preoccupied with her own beauty to the care of which she devotes most of her time, wanting her husband to notice it. The discussion between "the butterfly" and her husband foreshadows a fierce conflict between false and valid values. He is unable to resist her fascinating beauty, and yet unwilling to

sacrifice his own ambitions, and give up his job as a writer, and she, believing that he is hunting in the wrong direction, is not ready to give up her petty ambitions, and leave him in peace to continue his literary work.

In the second act, the playwright seizes the opportunity of the butterfly's birthday to make the audience more acquainted with the other members of the family and its friends. This widens the scope of his portrait and helps to bring many accurate and important details within its frame. The butterfly has adopted a peculiar method to exercise pressure on her husband ; whenever he refuses to gratify any of her whims, she stimulates a hysterical fit, and is supported in that by her mother. Finally Ramzī yields to pressure and consents to accept the position offered to him in the hope that he will be able to continue his literary work.

Two sincere friends of Ramzī are deeply worried about the situation in which the talented writer has been involved since his marriage. They are Ṣalah, a journalist and typical rebel who several times been in prison for political attacks on the then régime, and Huda, a cousin of Samīha and university student, who lives with the family. They fear that the butterfly will ruin him, and try to keep the light of his genius away

from its fluttering wings.

In the third and final act, the calamity is felt more strongly to Salah and Huda whose reciprocal esteem and silent love is brought into light. Ramzi is shown in a painful state of despair. He tries hard to write, but after several fruitless attempts he comes to the conclusion that he is no longer the writer whom the readers admired for years. Yet, he is unable to fit into the position chosen for him. Things are moving fast towards a climax. Believing that her husband is a social failure, that his abilities are insufficient for the realization of her ambitions, the butterfly uses her beauty, the only weapon she has, to hunt another man, the husband of one of her friends. Ramzi is now left alone, he has disappointed everybody, even Huda who always has unconditional faith in him : Salah, who has become engaged to Huda, is threatened with prison for an inflammatory article he has written. It is expected that Ramzi will exert his influence to protect his friend, but he tries to escape his responsibility, and when Huda succeeds in convincing him it is too late. Finally, Ramzi is seen trapped by both worlds. He has exposed and discharged a young employec of the firm, the son of a powerful pasha, for fraud and dishonesty, and the father has him dismissed from his post. Samiha demands a divorce.



He "is of no use of her", and she is "in love with another man". The tragedy of "the man who walks on no way of his and is brought to nothing" comes to a close with Samīha leaving the house, Ṣalāh and Huda coming in with the hope that their friend may be able to stand on his feet once again, but the sound of a bullet is heard announcing that Ramzī is no longer there.

Huda. : She is the killer ... Now he is no more than a handful of dust !

Ṣalāh. : Yes. A handful of dust !! She has put out the light !! (1)

At this time, the part of the stage, where Ramzī's room is, is in complete darkness, the other part, in which Ṣalāh and Huda go out on their life's journey, is brilliantly lighted.

(2)

Lu'bat al Hubb ( The Game of Love ), performed in 1962 is another modern tragedy of the same kind as the "Butterfly". In this play, the tragic situation arises from an apparent contradiction between traditions and conditions of life, which led in this particular case to a lack of equilibrium between physical and emotional maturity. As a matter of fact, this defect has created many situations in modern Egyptian life, which inevitably

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(1) p. 125.

Original p. 356.

(2) Lu'bat al Hubb ; Dār al-Gīl ;

1st ed. 1962.

lead to failure and misjudgment. Conditions of life are changing rapidly while certain traditions remain unchanged ; this causes the contradiction which led a decent family to horrible calamity.

However, one must add that, as in life, neither the members of the family nor the audience could forecast the calamity before it actually happen : Sawsan, the teen-age daughter of the family, has grown up in modern Egypt. Thus she can go to school and enjoy life, but not fall in love or get married without the consent of her family. 'Aṣām, her elder brother who is also the guardian of the family, believes blindly in tradition and refuses to recognize any emotional relation between his sister and any man before marriage. Although he is well-educated and married to a sensible and emotionally mature young lady, Nabīla, he, like his mother, thinks that love is a childish game, unsuitable for good girls. Even in his married life, he feels no difference between relations based on love and others resulting in a temporary sexual desire. The other member of the family, Zakī, the uncle, is a man who has no sense of responsibility, and there is an immoral streak in him.

The play contains also a character which is quite new on the Egyptian stage, but is very common in Egyptian life : Huraish the drum-seller, a symbol more than

a character, for the children's drums of the kind Huraish peddles are not enduring toys ; a child gets the drum, plays with it for a while, breaks it and throws it away, forgetting all about it till he hears the drum's sound again when he rushes to buy a new one. Huraish does not appear on the stage during the three scenes of the play, but the sound of his drum is always heard off stage to punctuate what is considered by the playwright as a "game of love". He appears only when the play comes to a close, and the sound of his drum is heard even after the final curtain is down. The introduction of this figure indicates what the author thinks of certain characters of the play. They are children seeking easy sensations, which are cheaply found and quickly forgotten.(1)

The game of love takes four different forms in the play, thus the plot consists of four parallel episodes.

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- (1) In his latest play "Journey Outside the Wall", R. Rushdī uses the same technique with far more complexity. There is a horse which neighs desperately all through the events of the play and tries to jump over the wall and gain its freedom. This neighing horse symbolises the characters of the play who feel as if they were surrounded with invisible walls and wish to get out.



The first is the love story of Sawsan and Murād, an idealistic pure attachment which represents the yet unsolved contradiction in the life of the young generation of Egypt. The second is the sexual relation between 'Aṣām and Lūla, a divorced woman who lives in the no man's land between the upper and middle classes. The third is the game between Zakī and Nagaf ; the former thinks that love, as far as he needs it, can be bought as any other commodity. The fourth is the trap set by Al-Sisī, a social failure who lives with his sister, Nagaf, in an annex to the family's villa. Ironically enough, it is 'Aṣām's game which pushes Sawsan and the whole family to distraction.

In the first scene of the play, Sawsan informs Nabīla of Murād's intention to marry her. She knows that Nabīla is the only member of the family who believes in love, so she wants her to approach her mother and brother to prepare the family for the expected proposal. When Nabīla tells her that 'Aṣām will surely agree, since he has already learnt from her that Sawsan and Murād love each other, Sawsan is horrified : "Woe is me! What a misfortune. Then he will never agree ". This contains in a nutshell, the outlook of 'Aṣām towards her sister's love affair. The outlook is the same as his mother's, though there is a generation

between them. When Nabila approaches her saying that Sawson is "pleased with " Murād, she receives the symptomatic answer : "We have no such girls who allow themselves to fall in love".(1)

These two statements sum up very aptly the prevalent traditional attitude towards love and marriage. It is the story of Qais and Layla repeating itself as it happened many centuries ago. The love affair of Murād and Sawson will not be given the opportunity to ripen into marriage but will be prevented from continuing.

'Asām's emotional immaturity create a difficult situation between him and his wife. He is unable to make an accurate assessment of his feelings towards his wife, and the other woman, and thinks that he is in love with both of them. But she thinks that he loves her, though his capacity to feel deep emotions is still limited. She wants to help him to discover himself and tells him that nobody can blame him if he is really in love with another woman, as love is not a crime. She herself cannot live with a man she does not love, so she does not want him to live with her unless the attachment between them is stronger than formal marriage ties alone.

At the same time, the game between Zaki and Nagaf is going towards its end. Becoming convinced that Nagaf cannot be bought in the ordinary way, Zaki offers to marry her, but not because he really wants to make her his wife. The marriage settlement will be paid and the marriage need not last longer than he wants it.

Nabila who suspects that there is some relationship between her husband and Lula, insists that it is time for him to be frank with her and himself : "If I find out myself, there will be no way back". Lula too wants him to take a decision ; he cannot love her and live with another woman at one and the same time. He has to divorce his wife and marry her. Thus she tries first to arouse his jealousy through some childish pranks, then she plans to disclose to Nabila the secret relationship between 'Aṣān and herself. When Nabila surprises her husband kissing Lula in their own garden, she decides to leave the house at once.

Sawsan, who happens to be looking out of the window, becomes unwillingly the witness of misconduct. She always admired her brother about whose character she deluded herself, and she is strongly attached to Nabila who is the only lovable character in the family. Nabila is the noble person who has sympathized with her own love affair from the start. Deeply shocked by



the scene, Sawsan runs distraught into the garden. In tears, she meets Al Sīsī, who has finally found his chance, and literally carries her to his room and seduces her. It is difficult to find a reasonable psychological explanation of Sawsan's fall, though one must agree that the shock she has sustained may have weakened her resistance. Sawsan has therefore to marry him in order to avoid disgrace, thus giving that social climber, who does not shrink from inflicting shame upon a young girl, an opportunity to get where he wants.

At this stage of the play, "the Game of Love" appears, as it really is, a tragedy in modern guise. The three episodes meet and crystallize the tragic impression of the whole play : Nabīla, who has left home after the discovery of her husband's unfaithfulness, returns ostensibly to collect her belongings and in reality to affirm to the family that " Love is greater than a mere game". In her discussion with 'Aṣām's mother, who does not know yet what has happened, she tells her that "Love is something worthy of respect. It is clean and decent, and only a clean and decent man can know what real love is."

Nabīla. : ... I think all of you are still asleep.  
 Yes, asleep. But you must wake up. You must wake up and open your eyes wide.

Love is not a game as you think.....

Mother. : What a disgrace. It is 'Aṣām who is making you so happy .. The man who is setting up your house.

... ..

Nabila. : A house like this ought to be pulled down.

This last sentence has an ominous ring : it pre-sages the impending tragedy. Nabila leaves the house, and when she slams the entrance door and the bell over it, which resembles the bell over the gates of old prisons, rings to announce her "departure from darkness to light ". The bell will continue ringing while other inhabitants, even Lula, leave the house.

The Game of Love comes to a close when Zakī, the uncle, comes into the garden to ask Al Sīsī when he will "deliver the goods" i.e. let him marry his sister. Al Sisi asks his sister, whom he used to look up like a prisoner, to come out, and at the same time beckons to Sawsan to come in. Awfully shocked by Al Sīsī's impudence, the mother asks 'Aṣām to prevent it, but Sawsan runs to hide herself behind Al Sīsī who defies them by presenting the marriage certificate.

While Sawsan is tugging at the iron bars of the window in Al Sīsī's room, the truth slowly dawns on

'Aṣām and his mother, that they are guilty of her misfortune. Zākī and his future wife go out, but are stopped on their way by Huraish, the symbolic figure, and the curtain falls.

The prison in which the older generation lives is the prison of tradition, but it has condemned Sawsan, a girl of the new generation, to a worse prison, a disgraceful life with a man who is her moral inferior and whom she does not love.



'Abdul Rahmān esh Sharqawī.

The Revival of Poetical Drama.

'Abdul Rahamān esh Sharqawī's Masāt Jamīla (1), ( Tragedy of Jamila ) is the first and perhaps the most successful attempt to revive Ahmad Shawqī's poetical drama. The true story of Jamīla Bu Haraid, the Algerian heroine, has acquired an almost legendary significance in Arab countries. There is, in reality, not one, but two Jamilas ; both are authentic Algerian heroines, and it is not the more but the less tragic figure which he has chosen as the central character of the play. Due to the circumstances surrounding the Algerian war of liberation, contemporary public opinion may even have confused one Algerian heroine with the other. However, there was a distinct difference of the actual tragic experience. It may even be said that Hind, whose role in the play appears marginal, would have made a more convincingly tragic central figure. History has elevated one and relegated the other into the background, and this situation has been even perpetuated in the play.

The Tragedy of Jamīla has hardly any plot, and

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(1) Dār al-Ma'anif ; 1962.

(2) The consideration which urged the author to cancel the real name of Hind should be appreciated.

the events on the stage are intended to mirror the historical happenings during the war of liberation as faithfully as possible, thus it is less a play than a documentary. What one sees on the stage of the individual experience of Muṣṭafa Bu Ḥarīd, Jāsir and Jamila consists of brief and laconic references to what is supposed to be general knowledge. The author stresses over and over again the fact that his protagonists are not heroes but ordinary human beings. What makes them appear heroic is the depth of feeling and the greatness of the human conflict in which they are caught up.

The gallery of peripheral figures is also composed of ordinary Arabs of flesh and blood. The overall impression one gains of Al Sharqāwī's ideology is that humanity must reassert itself whatever the cost. It is this approach that is most likely to infuse new blood in the present-day drama. This is, however, only the starting point of a trend which is capable of development, to which a great future can be predicted, but whose potentialities cannot as yet be assessed.

In the tragedy, which is a profession of faith in the inherited goodness of human nature, the poet believes even in the good will of the French ; he speaks of evils perpetrated in the name of the French nation. The lawyer Verger says to the military judges

prosecuting Jamila : Don't mix the people's memories of us, with the blood of victims." One can safely assume that Verger is, in this respect, the voice of human conscience, not only the mouthpiece of the poet. There are idealists not only among the Algerians, and not all Frenchmen must be branded as villains.

In spite of the tragic events he portrays, the poet is intensely optimistic as is evident in the following scene, which is the final scene of the play :

Jasir : In the stream of blood I see the brilliant future. If Jasir perishes, many Jasirs will arise, and tomorrow millions of Jamilas will grow up.

Jamila: Now we are alone as we used to be in the old days.

Jasir : That is how we come to know each other. We are alone again, together under one roof.

Jamila : We have fought together, and have known ...  
( blushing shyly ) and have known it together and have had to hide it...

Jasir : Say no more ..... Jasir is only one among millions ; a man who is working for life. If he dies .. if Jasir dies, thousands of men will lead the caravan in his place.

Jamila : O thou/who art living in the age of the rights



of man ...Stop these barbarous tragedies ...

Stop this pain.

We are of flesh and blood, not id~~oles~~ of  
stone.

We are not striving for the heroes crown.

We only want to live as others live.

Jāsir : Remember ... Jamila was only a girl like  
millions of girls. She had only one dream:  
to live as millions of girls live ; to  
become a wife and<sup>a</sup>/mother of good children  
like herself.

Jamila : So was Jasir .. A man like millions who  
loves goodness and justice and wishes to  
live in peace and become a father of good  
children like himself.

( the sound of an explosion is heard )

Jāsir : These are our companions.

Jamila : That is the bold sound that defies every-  
thing. ... It is the voice of Algeria which  
will resound forever, and will bring peace  
to our children.

Jāsir : It is the sound of the steps leading to the  
future which is drawing near.

Hail, my fellows.

Hit out until you rid the world of its

(316)

agony.

( soldiers enter and separate them,  
taking them to their respective  
destinations ).

Jamila : Farewell.

Jasir : Farewell.

Jamila : And hail to Man everywhere.

( the soldiers pull Jamila out of the  
dock while they repeat together ) And  
hail my brother, the Man in every place  
and time (1)

Curtain.

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(1) See original on page 357.

CONCLUSION.

The arrangement of Egyptian dramatic production according to playwrights has the great advantage of making subsequent classifications relatively easy. The plays dealt with in the preceding chapters can be grouped together according to the dominant trends of which they <sup>are</sup>/representative. The strongest of the trends observable in modern Egyptian drama, as they have emerged in the course of this work, is the social-purpose drama. It is significant because it is most deeply rooted in social, political and economic strife, which forms the background of contemporary life with the problems of which it attempts to deal.

From the beginning the playwrights were motivated by the wish to portray the unrest prevailing in the life of the country, to protest against the glaring contrast between the high and low, rich and poor, to help in abolishing mismanagement, inefficiency, corruption and above all, social injustice.

The spirit of the social-purpose drama is not conciliatory or optimistic. Since it is impossible to preserve and adapt, it is necessary to destroy in order to build up again. The playwrights are aware



that social corruption is strongly linked with the political and economic system in power, and so their plays show a strong inclination to political and self-criticism. After 1952, this basic trend undergoes a modification. The tree has been pruned, the rotten branches have been lopped off, but the ancient wrongs have not been forgotten. The mood is therefore one of " looking back in anger ". All the failures of the past are now ascribed without exception to the shortcomings of the former régime. As to their own part in the sins of the pre-revolutionary era, they are inclined to be *apologetic*. It is almost impossible to draw a dividing line between the political and the social play, because no play dealing with exclusively political matters has ever been written.

As regards their attitude towards the new régime, playwrights remained at first neutral for a while. Then, beginning to view the new life with some optimism, as in Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *Soft Hands*. The attitude prevailing in *As-Sultān al Ḥāir* can be conceived as a warning to the new regime not to forsake democracy.

The conviction prevails that the people must now be made to feel masters of their own destinies and

held responsible for any lack of success. This gives rise to a mood of self-criticism and soul-searching, this time stronger than ever before, though tinged, as in N u'mān 'Ashūr's 'Āilat ed Dughrī, with a good measure of optimism. If it is borne in mind that the political plays originated in the political conditions of the past, one can see that the objective of these plays has now been fulfilled, and the playwrights have turned to other topics. This is observable even in the work of the playwrights who took unusual interest in the political aspects of the pre-revolutionary era. The development of Sa'ed Dīn Wahba's plays gives a good example of this.

There is much less oratorical criticism in post-revolutionary social-purpose drama than there used to be before 1952. The conditions have vastly improved - a fact which is incontrovertible - and most Egyptian men of letters are inclined to be less critical of a system which they sincerely hope will lead the country to a brighter and happier future.

The problems touched upon in the nineteen - sixties - as in *Thou who Art Climbing the Tree*, *The Butterfly*, *The Unwilling God*, *The Hangman* and *the man to be Hanged* - deal with the essentially human rather than the social and national. The change of

approach has given rise to another trend, the symbolic trend, which is observable in most plays of today.

If one is allowed to predict, the prospect opening out before drama is fairly hopeful. For many reasons, dramatic literature is now on the right path. Even those most engaged in social and political matters now turn to symbolism, and the influence of Western drama is stronger than ever before. The number of new theatres can hardly keep pace with the plays available, and the demand for serious plays exceeds the supply.

In the field of social purpose drama, two different tendencies are represented by Nu'mān 'Āshūr and Rashād Rushdī. The former scope is wider than that of the latter and his approach is more optimistic ; the problems in which he is interested are the outcome of the new society and his plays give true pictures of society. Rashād Rushdī's depth is psychological and his approach is tragic. He deals with problems of great specific weight : the conflict between the longings and ambitions of man and his actual possibilities. He is thoroughly pessimistic as is easily observable in "The Butterfly" and the "Game of love". His world is a mad one ; in every man's life there is a butterfly that will lead him to perdition. Sex predominates as the motive force. In a way, the emergence of a symbolic trend is a reaction against the



political play.

The strong tendency towards social criticism, which it was thought would lead in the long run to a forceful confrontation of the two social orders, feudalism and socialism, proved unable to bring its promises to fulfilment. Pre-revolutionary social-purpose plays generally had a villain who was a feudalism, but they dealt with him individually, so that the attack was directed in equal measure against the individual and against the system. This has changed in the post-revolutionary era: the playwrights attack the old system exclusively, reducing the character ridiculed to a mere papier maché type and in some cases this lowered the artistic value of the play itself. Many of these plays can hardly be shrugged off as mere propaganda. They have deep cultural roots in the renaissance in all fields of Egyptian life.

Intelligent audience and critics have shown little interest in political plays, thus helping the theatre to pass beyond the all consuming political struggle. The new trend portrays social and human life more deeply, since drama is considered a " Super-structure like Truth, Religion and Philosophy ". This has resulted in a strong reaction in favour of the present-day symbolic and non-realistic drama.

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AR ABIC TEXTS



توفيق الحكيم : " المخرج "

المخرج : لا تقدر اني مخرج .. لا يهمني الا ما يحدث هنا على شاشة السينما .  
المساعد : ما حدث في الحياة يجب ان يهمني ايضا ...  
المخرج : الحياة ؟ الحياة هي هذه التي اخلقها بيدى هنا فوق هذه  
الشاشة ...

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...  
المخرج : انه في نظري لم يذهب . انه هنا دائما ( يشير الى الشاشة ) .  
المخرج : هذا الممثل فقدناه ولم يعد يصلح للعمل .  
المهندس : نعم مع الاسف . لالذنب جناء سوى انه اتقن عمله ، واخلص لدوره ،  
فماز فيه داخل الشاشة وخارج الشاشة .  
المخرج : هذا النوع من الاغلاص له اسم اخر عند اطباء الامراض العقلية .  
المهندس : نعم . كل تفلان في الاغلاص هو الى حد ما نوع من الجنون ...  
المخرج : كارثة علوى هي انه لم يخلق دور عظيم واستمر في عالم الوهم بعد  
تركه هذا الاستديو .

165

المهندس : لقد اعتقد انه يعيش في عالم حقيقي .  
المخرج : هذا خطأ .  
المهندس : خطأ من ؟ خطوه هو ، او خطأ المخرج الذي امره ان يعيش  
الدور كما كان حقيقة ؟ ...

...  
الفتاة : انظر الى هذه الشاشة . عندما تعرض عليها رواية من اخراجك  
... هل يراك الجمهور ؟

166

المخرج : لا ، بالطبع . ان المخرج لا يظهر .  
الفتاة : ومع ذلك تستطيع الجمهور ان يكون فكرة عنه ، ومن اخراجك  
واسلمها روحا .  
المخرج : هذا صحيح .



الفتاة : افترض ان ان شخصا انصرف بعد مشاهدة الرواية يقول . . . ان  
المخرج هذا حديث خرافة. ماذا يكون قولك في مثل هذا  
الشخص الذى ينكر وجودك ؟

.....

المخرج : ومن هذا الذى يجهل الان ان المخرج هو كل شىء فى الرواية ؟ . .  
الفتاة : انت المسئول اذن عن كل ما يرى على الشاشة .  
المخرج : طبعاً .

الفتاة : والممثلون ؟ لا ينبغي اذن ان يكونوا موضع ثواب او حساب .  
المخرج : انسييت ان لى اوامر وتنبيهات وتعليمات ؟ . . .

.....

الفتاة : اليست ديد مونة فى مبدأ الفيلم تجهل ما يخفيه لها القدر ؟ اى المخرج ؟ . .  
هل المستقبل بالنسبة اليها لن يظهر الا فى اخر الشريط . ان هذا  
الشريط الموضوع الان فى حقيبتك تحوى كل ماضى ديد مونة وحاضرها  
وستقبلها . . شريط يسجل حياة اشخاصك فى ازماتها المختلفة  
ومصائرهم المحتومة . انه " لوح محفوظ " . . . ان مايسمونه هم زمنا  
متاعبا لا يوجد بالنسبة اليك . . . انك خارج عن نطاق هذا الزمان  
والمكان .

" ايزيس " .

99 - 100

مسطاط : ايعجبك باتوت هذا الذى يحدث من شيخ الهاد ؟ . . .  
توت : ليس هذا من شأننا . . فانلحق باخواننا لنرفه عن اهل السوق بمزاميرنا .  
مسطاط : اهل السوق ليسوا اليوم فى حاجة الى مزاميرنا . انهم فى حاجة  
الى معونتتنا . . .

توت : انى لست بساحر . انى فنان ، سحرى هو فى فننى ، ولكنهم لا يريدون  
ان يفهموا هذا . . . كل حامل قلم عندهم ساحر . . .  
مسطاط : انهم على صواب ؟

توت : ماذا تقول ؟

مسطاط : كل حامل قلم سا حر . لماذا لا يكون الامر كذلك .

"السلطان الحائر" .

106

انت نفسك الذى ارانى فى البداية فضيلة القانون ، وما ينبغى له من احترام ، وقال لى انه السيد المطاع ، وقد انحنيت بكل خضوع حتى النهاية . ولكن هل كان يخطر لى على بال ان اراك فى اخر الامر تنظر الى القانون هذه النظرة ، وتجرده من رواه قدسيته ، فاذا هو بين يديك .

القاضى : انى لم اغل يدك يا مولاي . ان لك مطلق الحرية فى ان تمارس حكمك كما تشاء . 110-112

السلطان : حسن . انى ارى الان ما يجب على عمله .

السوزير : ماذا انت صا نع يا مولاي .

السلطان : انظر الى هذا الشيخ . اتراه يحمل سيفا فى منطقته ؟ كلا بالطبع انه لا يحمل غير لسان فى فمه يديره بكلمات وعبارات ، وانه ليحسن استخدام ما يملك بحذق وبراعة ، ولكنى انا احمل هذا ( يشير الى سيفه ) وهوليس من خشب ، ولا هو لعبة من اللعب . سيف حقيقى ، وينبغى ان يصلح لشيء ، ويجب ان يكون لوجوده سبب اتفهون كلامى ؟ اجيبوا . لماذا قدر لى ان احمل هذا ؟ اللزينة ام للعمل .

.....

وانت ايها القاضى .. لماذا لاتجيب

القاضى : لاحدهما .

السلطان : ماذا تقول ؟

القاضى : اقول لهذا اولذاك .

السلطان : ماذا تعنى ؟



القاضى : اعنى ان لك الاختيار . لك ان تجعله للعمل ، ولك ان تجعله  
للزينة . انى معترف بما للسيف من قوة اكيدة ، ومن فعل سريع  
واثر حاسم . ولكن السيف يعطى الحق للاقوى ، ومن يدور غدا  
من يكون الاقوى . . . . اما القانون فهو يحى حقوقك من كل عدوان ،  
لانه لا يعترف بالاقوى . انه يعترف بالاحق . والان فما عليك  
يامولاى سوى الاختيار : بين السيف الذى يفرضك ولكنه يعرضك  
وبين القانون الذى يتحداك ولكنه يحميك

... ..

السلطان : ( للوزير ) يا لهذا الشيخ اللعين . ان له عبقرية نادرة فسى ان  
يوقعنا فى الحيرة .

القاضى : انه ما صنعت يامولاى غير انى طرحت عليك وجهى المسألة ، عليك  
انت الاختيار .

السلطان : الاختيار ؟ الاختيار ؟ . . . . تلك ساعة المخيفة . الساعة المخيفة  
لكل حاسم . ساعة يصدر القرار الاخير . القرار الذى يغير مجرى  
الامر . ساعة ينطق بهذا اللفظ الصغير الذى يبت فى الاختيار  
الحاسم . . . . الاختيار الذى يقرر المصير .

" ياطالع الشجرة " .

الزوجة : اطلع يا بهادر . الجورطب .

الزوج : ( وهو يدخل حاملا ادوات الحديقة ) اعرف . عندما تبدأ الرطوبة  
فى الجو تدخل الشبخة خضرة سكنها . لكن الذى لا اعرفه هو  
ان الرياح اليوم ساكنة ، ومع ذلك تسقط بعض ثمار البرتقال . .  
ما الذى اسقطها .

الزوجة : كانت اول ثمرة ، وانا التى اسقطتها بيدي . لم يكن وقتئذ يريد هسا ،  
بسبب الفقر . قال لى لا تربكنى الان بالخلف .

الزوج : وهذا هو الذى يربكنى حقا : ان تكون الرياح ساكنة ومع ذلك . . .

الزوجة : ومع ذلك سمعت كلامه ، وفعلتها .. فعلتها بنفسى .. وهبت رياح السعد بعد ذلك ، وانشأنا هذا الفضل وهذه الحديقة .

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 جورج : جرمی یا سیدی انی نفذت الاوامر .  
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سعد : كنت اقدر افتح الباب ...

نصار : كنت قتلتك نفسك وقتلتنى .

سعد : بس يرضيك انى اشترى حياى بالخوف ؟

نصار : معلش . وفيها ايه دى . اصل اللي رباك يا ابنى كان ميت عليك م الخوف .

ما تطعلش ليه انت ميت م السخوف على نفسك . يلعن ابوك اللي رباك .

يلعن ابوها أنا .

سعد : انت دائما تخلى نفسك مسئول عن كل حاجة يا بابا ، حتى عن خوفى .

نصار : ياخيه يا ابو السعور . معلش خلاص انا انتهيت . انما تعرف دلوقت .

بس نفسى الايام ترجع تانى ، واعيش تانى عيشة تانية غير اللي عيشتها .

لعيش ما اخافش . لعيش ما استحلش اهانة واربيكم تانى . اربيكم وانا

مش خايف عليكم . على الطلاق بالتلاتة ان اللي يرضى يعيش ذليل

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حميدة ( الام ) : عيب يا نبيلة ما تقولى ش كده . مش ده عصام اللي مهنك وفاتح

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ان يكن جاسر قد ضاع

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فكم/جاسر سوف يجىء

وغدا تنبت مليون جميلة

جميلة : نعمن اصبحتنا وحيدين .. كما قديما ..

جاسر : هكذا نحن تعرفنا .. واصبحتنا وحيدين معا

تحت سقف واحد .

جميلة : نحن كافحتنا معا ..

وفرقتنا ال ..

( تضطرب وتخجل ثم تستمر ) ورفقتنا معا ، وكفناها معا  
.....

جاسر : ابيكتى .. لا تقولى بعد

.....

لم يكن جاسر الا رجلا كلابين الرجال

رجلا يعمل من اجل الحياة

فان مات .. اذا مات جاسر

سيقتود الركب آلاف سواه

جميلة : ايها الاحياء فى عصر الحقوق البشرية

اوقفوا تلك المآسى الهمجية . اوقفوا هذا المذاب .

نحن من لحدودم ، لا رموز من رخام

نحن لانبحث عن مجد البطولة

انما نطلب ان نحيا كما يحيا سوانا .

جاسر : انكروا ان جميلة لم تكن الا فتاة كلابين سواها

لم تكن تحلم الا ان تعيش كلابين البنات

ثم تغدو بعد هذا زوجة تنزع الارض صفارا طيبين .. مثلهما

جميلة : لم يكن جاسرا ايضا

غير انسان يحب الخير والعدل ويهوى ان يعيش  
في سلام كمالين الرجال ، ثم يغدو بعد هذا والدا  
يمنح الارض صفارا طيبين مثله .